Term Limits

With the exception of New Hampshire and Vermont which retain a two year term, all states, commonwealths and territories provide for four year terms for governors. In all states, except Virginia, governors in their first term may run for re-election. In thirty-eight states, commonwealths and territories, governors may not serve more than two consecutive terms. While it is possible for governors in more than half of these term-limited states to run for the office again after a hiatus, it is very unusual for them to do so.

For additional information on gubernatorial term limits, see NGA's Current List of Governors' Political Affiliations & Terms of Office. For state by state information on term limits, see "Constitutional and Statutory Provisions for Number of Consecutive Terms of Elected State Officials" (Table 4.9 from the Book of the States by the Council of State Governments).

While term limits for governors have a relatively long history, term limits for state legislatures are more recent with citizens initiatives limiting the terms of legislators in California, Colorado, and Oklahoma in 1990. Subsequently, eighteen other states have adopted term limits. However, in four states (Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming) term limits were thrown out by the state supreme courts. Term limits have also been repealed by the legislatures in Idaho and Utah. The result equals fifteen states with term limits for legislators. For additional information, see the overview on legislative term limits available from the National Conference of State Legislatures.

All states except Oregon provide for the impeachment of governors. As in the case of the federal government, the impeachment process in most states starts with the lower body of the legislature and the trial is conducted by the upper body. The process is reversed in Alaska where the Senate holds the impeachment power and the impeachment trial is conducted by the House. In most cases, impeachment requires a majority of members, while conviction generally requires two-thirds or other special majority. For state by state information on impeachment, see "Impeachment Provisions in the States"(Table 4.8 from the Book of the States by the Council of State Governments).

In the event of a vacancy in office, the lieutenant governor is the designated official who succeeds the governor in forty-two states and four territories. In the remaining states and territories, other officials designated to succeed the governor include the secretary of the senate, president of the senate, and speaker of the senate. For more information on term limits and succession, see "The Governors," (Table 4.1 from the Book of the States by the Council of State Governments).