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Governors becoming vice presidents? Rarely rewarding

Published: Sunday, July 15, 2012, 7:26 AM

By **Star-Ledger Guest Columnist**

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By **David J. Andersen**
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Will former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney select another current or former governor as his vice presidential nominee? History does not favor such a selection.

From John Adams (who took office with George Washington in 1789) through Joe Biden (elected with Barack Obama in 2008), the United States has had 47 vice presidents. Fifteen of them (32 percent) had been governors, including George Clinton, who served from 1805 to 1812 as the No. 2 to two presidents (Thomas Jefferson and James Madison) and Nelson Rockefeller, who was appointed to the office 1974.



Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Gov. Chris Christie stumps in January for GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney in New Hampshire. Some say Christie's style may help the GOP ticket.

Yet in modern times, looking to the pool of governors for potential vice presidents seems largely to have gone out of style. Fully half of the first 16 and five of the next 13 had been governors.

However, since Calvin Coolidge (Massachusetts) ascended to the presidency in 1923, only two of America's 18 vice presidents had been a state's chief executive. One, Spiro Agnew (Maryland), was elected and re-elected in 1968 and 1972, and the other, Rockefeller (New York), was appointed in 1974.

Having two governors on the same ticket is even less common. Only six teams of governors or former governors have been victorious, and none since 1912, when the Democratic governors of New Jersey and Indiana, Woodrow Wilson and Thomas R. Marshall, were elected.

It has been more than 60 years since a party even put forward such a ticket; that was in 1948, when the Republican team of New York and California Govs. Thomas Dewey and Earl Warren was defeated by incumbent President Harry Truman and his vice presidential candidate, Sen. Alben Barkley of Kentucky.

Nevertheless, the vice presidency must seem a tempting role to governors and their supporters, at least in part for offering a possible springboard to a presidency. In fact, six of the 17 governors who became president also had a stint as vice president on their résumés.

A sobering thought for governors seeking the vice presidency — and perhaps more so for a

potential presidential nominee such as Romney — is that of the six governors to move from the vice presidency to the presidency, the most recent four all ascended to the office upon the death of the president. One must go back to Martin Van Buren's victory in 1838 to find a former governor elected to the presidency after serving as vice president.

In total, nine vice presidents have been elected president, including four former governors, two of whom — Theodore Roosevelt (New York) and Coolidge — first gained the office when the president died. Of those nine, none completed two terms as president. Richard Nixon came closest, as the only former vice president to win two presidential elections, but he was forced to resign the office.

In conclusion, for governors setting their sights on the White House, the direct path of running at the top of the ticket has been more fruitful than making a stop to serve as vice president. This has been particularly true in recent times.

The vice presidency, in fact, is in a 40-year gubernatorial drought. No present or former governor has been elected to the office since 1968 and 1972, when Agnew was Nixon's running mate for election and re-election; and only one — Sarah Palin (Alaska) in 2008 — has been a party's vice presidential nominee.

So, while no governors were among the last six vice presidents, four were among the six most recent presidents: Jimmy Carter (Georgia), Ronald Reagan (California), Bill Clinton (Arkansas) and George W. Bush (Texas).

John Weingart is the associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers. David J. Andersen is an assistant research professor at the Center on the American Governor, Eagleton Institute of Politics. Have an opinion? Go to njvoices.com.



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