

# Roles and Powers of Virginia's Executive Branch

The executive branch in Virginia enforces the laws and plays a key role in the policymaking process. The governor of Virginia exercises the formal powers granted by the Virginia Constitution. In carrying out formal and informal powers of the office, the governor fills several roles, including:

## Chief of State

This role is more symbolic than the other roles, it is nevertheless a primary feature of the modern governorship. As chief of state, the governor represents and embodies the state. He or she is the focal point for internal and external observers of the state.

## Chief Legislator

Probably the most important role of the governors in the modern period is that of chief legislator. Governors must often take the lead in lawmaking process. They typically involve themselves very directly in the laws considered and passed by the state legislative body. The office of governor and the political environment in the states all encourage governors to assume an active role in lawmaking. State constitutions and laws offer governors some formal tools that they can use in their legislative leader roles, including the veto, the power to present a state of the state address, and the power to prepare and administer the budget.

## Chief Administrator

The second key role of the governor is that of chief executive. Most state constitutions contain language indicating that the governor must take care that the laws are "faithfully executed," perhaps the most obvious of the governor's jobs. The role of chief executive is an extremely difficult one. Governors must oversee the execution of the laws. Given the enormity of the challenge, they cannot do this job on their own. They must work with the state bureaucracy to carry out the laws. Consequently, governors are responsible for managing the bureaucracy. This managerial role is another truly massive undertaking. Bad administration of the laws equals bad laws.

## Party Chief

Another primary role of governors is that of chief of party. This role is not an official job of the office, but it grows naturally from the governor's position as the highest elective officer of his party in the state.

## Commander-in-Chief

Governors also serve a military role. As chief executives, they are responsible for the health and safety of the citizens of their states. Further, they are designated the commanders-in-chief of their state National Guards. Under certain circumstances, such as during a declared emergency, some states' governors can exert extraordinary powers to suspend authority, seize personal property, direct evacuations, and authorize the release of emergency funds. Governors are also critically important as the voice of the states in communicating with the public, requesting federal disaster assistance, and assisting residents in coping with the disaster.

As Chief Administrator, the Governor manages the execution of laws through cabinet secretaries and departments, agencies, commissions, and regulatory boards. These parts of the state bureaucracy:

- Administer laws
- Enforce laws
- Regulate aspects of business and the economy
- Provide services

