

Hochul wants governor, lieutenant governor to run on same ticket in primaries, sources say



The New York State Capitol in Albany. Gov. Kathy Hochul is pushing for changes to election law in the state budget that would allow a governor and lieutenant governor to run on the same ticket in the primary, sources say. Credit: AP/Hans Pennink

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ALBANY — Gov. Kathy Hochul is pushing for changes to election law in the state budget that would allow a governor and lieutenant governor to run on the same ticket in the primary, legislative sources familiar with negotiations told Newsday.

Currently lieutenant governors run separately in primary elections, leaving the potential for a governor and lieutenant whose politics don't necessarily align to be on the same ticket in the general election.

The proposal would allow the governor to choose who she runs with, which could help create a more cohesive executive branch of government while helping Hochul avoid potential missteps, political strategists and analysts told Newsday.

“This is really about government and having a partner that’s in sync,” said Larry Levy, executive dean of the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University.

Hochul spokesman Avi Small declined to comment on ongoing negotiations and the proposal.

The Democrat’s proposal comes after Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado publicly broke with Hochul, getting ahead of her in calling for former President Joe Biden to drop his bid for reelection and in calling for New York City Mayor Eric Adams to resign. In February, Delgado announced he is not planning to run as Hochul’s running mate in next year’s election.

“I think this proposal reflects lessons learned and is an attempt to try and neutralize any of those things from happening again,” Na’ilah Amaru, a Democratic strategist, told Newsday.

Hochul is pushing the primary change as part of the proposed \$252 billion state budget, according to the news first reported by Politico.

The budget, which was due on April 1, is now more than a week late. State lawmakers passed a third extension on Monday.

Hochul drew criticism from good government groups and legislative leaders for throwing another policy proposal into the process so late in the game.

“It just adds what we already have to deal with,” said Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers), who on Tuesday told reporters the proposal was briefly discussed and there were “mixed feelings” about it. “But again, it’s something we will consider. Does it belong in the budget? Probably not. But here it is.”

In New York State, the main role of the lieutenant governor is to serve as president of the State Senate, and to assume the role of governor if the governor is impeached, resigns, is absent or dies. The governor can also assign other duties, for example heading committees or task forces.

Gubernatorial candidates typically pick a running mate who they believe will help them politically, be it geographically, racially, ethnically, gender, or ideologically, Levy said. It’s common for an upstate governor to pick a downstate lieutenant governor, for example.

Mismatched tickets

But having the top two people in government on “different pages and with different agendas, again, can cause confusion and chaos and impede the smooth running of the executive branch,” he said.

There’s a history of mismatched governor and lieutenant governors, former Gov. David Paterson told Newsday, pointing to a few examples such as former Lt. Gov. Betsy McCaughey Ross, now Betsy McCaughey, who “fell out so badly” with Republican Gov. George Pataki, she ran against him in 1998 as a Democrat, he said.

Paterson, a Democrat, also described falling out with his own lieutenant governor, the late Richard Ravitch. Ravitch in 2010 crafted his own budget reform plan, which conflicted with Paterson's as the state faced a massive budget deficit.

"This problem has persisted for a long time and perhaps the way to solve it would be to directly let the governor choose the lieutenant governor," Paterson said.

Being able to select a running mate would allow a governor, no matter who is running, to "neutralize obstacles and challenges before they become political liabilities," Amaru said. The legislation also would allow Hochul to avoid having a candidate from the far-left as her running mate, she said.

But it could be perceived as "antidemocratic," Amaru said. "There's that tension between a government that functions and free choice of voters to select who they want to select as elected officials."

The proposal drew support from Republican Sen. Joseph Griffo (R-Rome), who proposed similar legislation, to update "antiquated and archaic state laws," he said in a news release. Griffo said his proposal would "potentially prevent incompatible candidates from being forced to run and serve together in office."

It's unclear whether the proposal will make it into the final budget.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx), on Tuesday said his conference hadn't discussed the proposal yet. Heastie has been against putting policy in the budget process.

"Under what set of good governance principles do you add an entirely new budget item during negotiations when the budget is already a week late?" Susan Lerner, executive director of the good government group Common Cause/NY, told Newsday.

The reported proposal "merits discussion and possible revision," Lerner said. "But throwing a curveball into the budget when it's already one week late is just not acceptable."