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*Acting Lieutenant Governor, AKA Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, Speaks of his Experiences*  
By Karen DeWitt

**ALBANY NEW YORK (2008-05-30) The tumult in Albany this spring has left many people with new jobs and titles, including the Senate Majority Leader, Joe Bruno, who is now also acting Lieutenant Governor. The Senator spoke of what his new responsibilities have been like, and what they could mean for the future of the state senate, at a forum hosted by Rockefeller Institute.**

When Eliot Spitzer resigned in disgrace last March and David Paterson ascended to the Governor's post, the lieutenant governor's post became vacant. Under the state's constitution, Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno became acting lieutenant governor. He's likely to remain in that post until the end of 2010, when new gubernatorial elections are held.

**Bruno, who feuded bitterly with former Governor Spitzer, gets along well with Paterson, and he praised the new governor when speaking at the Rockefeller Institute forum.**

"David Paterson gets it," said Bruno. "This governor understands what negotiation is about, what partnering is about, what comprising is about."

Under the state's constitution, the lieutenant governor steps into the role of governor whenever the governor is incapacitated or, outside the state's boundaries. In modern times, with cell phones and e-mails, the powers are not transferred whenever a governor is traveling. Bruno did not need to take the reins when Paterson had two recent laser eye surgeries, because the governor was conscious throughout them. But he recounts a phone call he received a few weeks ago, from Paterson who had traveled to Washington.

"When I picked up the phone, he said 'hi governor', and I said 'what's going on'," Bruno recounted. "He said 'I'm in Washington and I'm not sure my staff wanted you to know that, but I'm calling you.'"

Bruno says he joked with Paterson about what he would do in the governor's absence.

"Stay there as long as you want, I know where your office is, I have a few things in mind," Bruno says he told Paterson, in jest. "You'll find out when you get back. But don't hurry."

But the Senator says if there really were an emergency, he would not do anything that was inconsistent with Paterson's policies.

The Lieutenant Governor has few other responsibilities under the state's constitution. He or she presides over the State Senate, and casts the deciding vote if there's a tie. But even that aspect of the job is a matter of contention, in a closely divided Senate. Some interpret the rule to mean that the lieutenant governor can only weigh in on procedural matters, not legislation. Bruno has a different interpretation. He believes, that as Senate Leader and acting Lieutenant governor, he actually can vote twice.

"I am happy to have two votes in the Senate, and I can manage it," he said.

Having the power to cast a double vote could be critical in the closely divided Senate, where Republicans are clinging to just a two vote majority. Bruno's interpretation also means that, if Democrats win the majority in the Senate by just one seat after November's elections, Bruno could use his two votes to ensure that a Republican remains the majority leader.

**The forum at the Rockefeller Institute focused on whether or not the current method of filling a vacancy for lieutenant governor should**

**be changed.** Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, a Democrat from the Buffalo area, is sponsoring a bill that would allow a lieutenant governor who is elevated to governor to appoint his own lieutenant governor, subject to approval by a vote of the entire legislature. The legislature already has the power to elect a new Comptroller and Attorney General. They used this authority in February 2007, when they elected Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, to replace Alan Hevesi, who was also forced to resign in a scandal. Currently, there are numerically more Democrats than Republicans in the legislature, so under Schimminger's proposal, Assembly Democrats would have the most clout in choosing a lieutenant

governor, just as they did when picking the new Comptroller. At the forum, Senator Bruno told the Assemblyman that he did not see the bill making much headway in the GOP-led Senate.

While Bruno's relationship with Paterson has so far been warm and friendly, the Senator got a taste of the plight of most lieutenant governors in recent decades, who are often kept in the dark on key policy decisions. Bruno confessed that he had been very surprised to learn just that morning that Paterson, without informing his acting lieutenant governor, had signed a directive to recognize gay marriages in New York from other states and jurisdictions.