

A Conversation With New York Tax Commissioner Jerry Boone

by Arthur R. Rosen



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In this edition of *The Art of SALT*, Rosen interviews Jerry Boone, the new commissioner of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

On June 16 the New York Senate confirmed Democrat Gov. Andrew Cuomo's selection of Jerry Boone as commissioner of Taxation and Finance. Boone comes to the job with a wealth of experience as an attorney, large-organization manager, and neighborhood entrepreneur.

Upon graduation from law school in 1979, Boone was accepted into the federal government's honors program, where he became deeply engaged in many facets of the federal government — particularly focusing on transportation issues and related legislative activities.

Boone then joined the New York Office of the Attorney General, where over the next several years he rose from a staff attorney to head of a bureau, ultimately becoming the state's solicitor general, a position he held until 1994. While at the attorney general's office, Boone was involved in a wide range of litigation matters, spending much of his efforts on real estate and fiscal issues.

"I was proud to recognize Jerry's ability and leadership potential in the attorney general's office," former Attorney General Robert Abrams said. "He performed with distinction in all that he did."

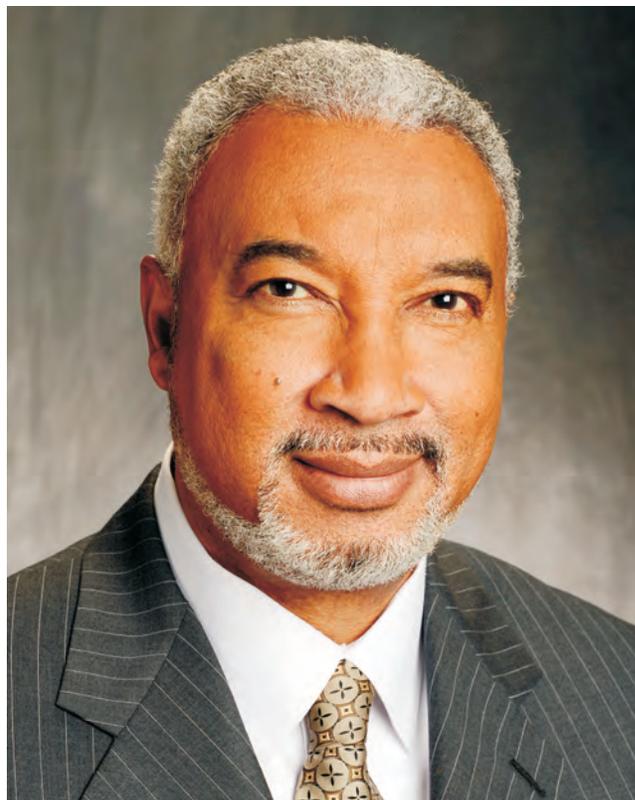
Regarding Boone's recent appointment, Abrams emphasized that "Jerry is a man of total integrity who brings talent and diverse experience to his new post as commissioner of Taxation and Finance."

On leaving the attorney general's office, Boone joined the gambling and entertainment giant Harrah's, where he quickly transitioned from being an attorney to being on a "CEO track." In that role, he became immersed in every aspect of running a complex business: managing a wide range of workforce issues, navigating various business situ-

ations, pulling together multiple business units' diverse needs, and critically focusing on operations.

Boone left Harrah's in late 2007 to work on "pulling together affordable housing" projects in the mid-South, mostly in Tennessee. In that endeavor, Boone regularly dealt with community organizations, local construction entrepreneurs, and financiers.

Much like his predecessor, Thomas Mattox, Boone was enticed into returning to public service, and especially to New York's executive branch, by Cuomo's vision and plans. Both commissioners have said that the governor's leadership to make New York "a great place" again — using 21st-century know-how — was a driving force in accepting Cabinet appointments.



Jerry Boone

Boone first served in the Cuomo administration as president of the Civil Service Commission and commissioner of the Department of Civil Service from 2012 until his recent appointment as tax commissioner. While at the Civil Service Department, Boone, relying on both his varied legal background and his extensive management experience, was an enthusiastic supporter of the governor's business-friendly strategy and was able to focus on "getting the best out of people."

"I championed administrative reform and modernizing workforce practices while at Civil Service and am now ready for my next challenge," Boone said.

Whether as a lawyer or a business executive, Boone said he has always been "fascinated" by tax. Now he can influence tax policy and make tax the center of his full professional focus.

Boone said that he had always perceived the Department of Taxation and Finance as a highly respected, very professional, and capable agency; he added that he is now learning that his perception was valid. Moreover, Boone said that he has been impressed by the pride and passion that tax department personnel demonstrate in executing their responsibilities.

As tax commissioner, Boone is planning to focus on the three elements he said are essential for running any large organization: talent, technology, and teamwork. He hopes to make the tax department more transparent and raise its

profile through improved community engagement in both the corporate and individual taxpayer arenas. Also, Boone acknowledged that fighting cyber-invasions to safeguard personal information will be a major focus, as it is with many state revenue agencies.

Boone also wants to improve and advance tax policy from within the department by working with the governor's office and the State Legislature — something he said will require cooperation and coordination throughout the process.

Boone acknowledged that current tax laws must be scrutinized to accommodate "today's digital economy," as well as in light of Cuomo's drive "to truly make New York more business-friendly." As a model to be followed, he points to the success of the process that culminated in New York's enactment of corporate tax reform last year.

It is clearly a time of rapid change for New York and its tax department — an agency that touches the lives of every New Yorker in one way or another and perhaps most businesses in the United States. There will be no shortage of issues and challenges. Yet all of the commissioners since the 1960s have brought their areas of expertise to bear in their largely successful efforts at making the department a more effective, efficient, and customer-oriented agency. Leveraging his unique combination of private and public sector experience, Boone seems to be well-suited to continue this tradition of leadership. ☆