

Inaugural Address of Governor Cecil H Underwood

January 15, 1957

For the 25th time in its history, West Virginia looks, at this moment, to the inauguration of a new government. Our people listen to hear the ambitions of a new administration.

This colorful ceremony represents the work and contributions of many people. My sincere thanks to all who helped with these arrangements and to all of you for your presence. I am deeply grateful for the hundreds of high school youth who compose these bands here today and represent the future of our State for which we build. Also, my genuine appreciation is due the men in the uniform of our National Guard and other branches of the Armed Forces who represent our desire and determination to keep our country, as well as our State, strong and free.

You who are gathered here are joined by many more citizens who in their homes and work places hear, see and share this meaningful hour. From West Virginians everywhere, there rolls in upon us here a high tide of good will, of helpful intent, of joinder in the great tasks ahead.

Last November, West Virginia voters demonstrated their right to think and act for themselves. They chose to vest in each of our two great political parties a share of state government. Their mandate is a clear summons to each party to produce its highest qualities of leadership and to vie with each other in devising the soundest and best measures for the advancement of our State.

I have been heartened beyond measure by the statesmanlike attitude and declarations of those of both parties who are to serve with me in the Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches of the State Government. Conscious of their cooperation, I shall at all times respect fully the constitutional functions and rights of each of these coordinate branches of government. I am possessed and thrilled by the conviction that ahead of us is an era of good feeling, of mutual respect and full cooperation.

IMMEDIATE REFORMS

Throughout the campaign I used a ladder to symbolize my ambitions for West Virginia. As the ladder is used to carry one to higher levels, it characterizes my hope and my determination at this very moment. With the aid of those who will serve with me, I shall strive to bring every activity and service of state government to a new high level of economy, efficiency and integrity.

In compliance with campaign pledges, I am prepared to initiate immediately numerous reforms. I desire to speak now of a few specific purposes:

I shall seek:

First, to procure appointees for state service equal in capacity and training to those occupying positions of similar responsibility in business, industry and education . . . men and women who elevate public service above personal gain.

Second, to make sure that all appointees be privileged to keep, as their sole emolument, the salaries they receive. No longer shall any employee of this government be asked to pay for the privilege of working.

Third, to make certain that tax dollars buy as much as business and industry dollars in the commodity and equipment markets. In the face of today's needs, this State cannot afford the luxury of political premium prices.

Fourth, to keep taxes to the irreducible minimum through the effective use of every practicable economy. Spending units will be rewarded for seeking means to save tax dollars instead of devising schemes to spend every dollar appropriated.

GOVERNMENTAL PERSONNEL

My campaign was based on a firm pledge to make sweeping changes in the basic philosophies, policies and practices of state government. Such changes are achieved only through those persons who administer the public service. No conscientious man or woman should remain in any official position who is not in sympathy with the ideals and policies of those responsible to the people for such government.

The election was a clear mandate of the people that these changes should be affected. Accordingly, I am requesting the resignation of all state officials who hold office by virtue of executive appointment, and whose tenure is subject to executive action.

This action does not mean that all such resignations will be accepted immediately. Quite possibly, some of them may never be accepted. However, in order that I may have complete freedom of action as the new chief executive, I believe it to be my duty to make this request.

Those department heads, whose responsibility it is to administer their respective services, shall have a free hand in selecting personnel within their departments. These persons to whom I assign departmental administration will be men and women of good reputation, character and standing in their respective communities, whom I believe to be interested in rendering the best public service. It will not be their function to organize a political machine.

Employees will be selected on the basis of experience, qualifications, and a showing of industry and interest in the particular tasks they are asked to perform. From personal acquaintance and friendship, I know there are many employees now in the State Government who possess the requisite qualifications for public service.

SERVICES OF GOVERNMENT

Within certain well defined fields every citizen has the right to expect service and benefit from his State government. Among other things, the average citizen is interested in job opportunities for himself, education for his children, roads for his travel, recreation for his leisure, hospitals for his care, agriculture for his food, law enforcement for his protection, honorable government for his pride.

These are only a few of the areas in which our state government attempts to provide services today. In the face of a declining population in our own State and a record national industrial expansion, we are compelled to examine carefully our plans to attract new industries to West Virginia. Any effort is commendable. But no matter how colorful our approach, we cannot hide basic weaknesses in transportation, education, recreation and other important services which people and industry demand. The searching eye of a prospective industrial investor will pierce any glossy Madison Avenue cover page we can design. Through realistic efforts to solve basic problems, we can make our greatest contribution to the attraction of new industries and render maximum service to all our people.

If my administration achieves no other goal, I hope that at the end of four years it will be remembered as one that made real progress toward the solution of our road problems. Immediately, I will reorganize the State Road Commission to attract highly qualified personnel, to spend wisely the road revenues now collected from our taxpayers, and to secure every available dime of federal aid for our use.

SUPPORT OF EDUCATION

Rich as our natural resources are, they cannot compare with the youth in our State. The demands of these youth for education still constitute one of our major problems. My administration will lend every effort to the search for a proper balance between state and local support of education. As I see it, we are obligated to provide educational opportunities with incentives for youth, teachers and the taxpaying public.

Other specific programs I shall present in my various messages to the Legislature.

In recent weeks I have visited personally in many state institutions. I expect to continue to investigate first hand the circumstances surrounding government operations. As your Governor, I do not propose to sit within the walls of this capitol building for four years; rather, I want to move often among the people. Problems are easier to understand and solve when they are studied at their sources.

The idea of good public relations has become a consuming passion with many business and commercial enterprises in this modern day. Numerous organizations employ extensive staff personnel to deal with myriads of publics with which they are concerned.

I believe firmly that State Government desperately needs a program of good public relations in every department of its structure. In this instance, my administration will be concerned with only one public - the citizens of West Virginia, who will be viewed alike, taxed alike and served alike.

REPORTS TO PEOPLE

I plan to report often to the people of the State via the press, radio and television. In this manner, I can keep in constant touch with the people, acquaint them with the step-by-step development of our program and afford them the opportunity to judge intelligently the wisdom of our course of action.

As your Governor, I shall - within the limits of physical endurance - stand ready to listen to every citizen of the State, regardless of party affiliation, station in life, race or creed. I regard every vote for me as the voters promissory note, payable on demand, in good will, wise counsel and helpful service, not to me, but to our great State. Only as many able citizens share with me their vast accumulations of experience and wisdom shall I, in more than a small degree, be able to meet the challenge of this office. I beg of you, my fellow West Virginians, to make common cause and take an earnest citizen's full part with those of us who, as your servants, endeavor after the betterment of West Virginia.

Ours is today, I feel, "The Opportunity State". We West Virginians owe it to ourselves to live throughout the next four years at today's level of good feeling and high endeavor.

With all humility I undertake the responsibilities which are now mine - trusting in Almighty God for strength and guidance. I shall give to the people of West Virginia the best that is within me. With their help and understanding, we shall not fail.