

# **Inaugural Address of Governor John D Rockefeller IV**

**January 19, 1981**

My fellow West Virginians, distinguished guests:

Today is a day of affirmation - and for me and for all the people of West Virginia.

Today I reaffirmed the oath I took four years ago - an oath to serve God and the people of West Virginia.

While the words I spoke today were the same as then, the commitment I make to you now is a stronger one.

The commitment I reaffirm today has been tested in the last four years - by challenge - by crisis - by success - and sometimes by error.

The commitment I reaffirm has grown as I have traveled among our people - listened to you - learned from you - and been reminded every day of the greatness of West Virginia and the special wonders of our state.

And ladies and gentlemen, my commitment to this State of West Virginia - to this job - and to the future we all share together - has been strengthened as I have taken our message to the rest of the nation and to the world.

For what we are and what we can become is truly unique.

Today, as I reaffirm my oath, I feel even more certain of that than I did four years ago.

Our people are very special.

Few have easy lives.

Few have an overabundance of the material things so glorified in our national culture.

But all West Virginians feel a special spirit and determination.

The West Virginia spirit is a spirit of giving and sharing - and ours is a determination that working together we can overcome all obstacles.

The unity among us helps our people meet the difficult demands of everyday life - and it strengthens us as we move toward our destiny.

West Virginia's great natural resources - their beauty and their potential - are part of our destiny. From Mercer in the South, to Hancock in the North, from Jefferson in the East, to Cabell in the West, we have mountains and lakes and rivers and forests that cause wonderment in all who behold them.

More than that, we also have the energy resources that are a key to our nation's future.

During a long and hard-fought campaign to keep this office, one columnist referred to me as the man from C.O.A.L.

His remarks then contained more than a small element of political satire, but I welcomed the label then and I welcome that label now.

For truly, all West Virginians are men and women from coal.

Our state is blessed with the resources to help this nation out of its dependence on foreign oil.

Our coal miners, our steelworkers, our chemical and glass workers, our oil and natural gas workers, all of us, are challenged with the task of helping to make sure the torch of America's freedom continues to burn brightly.

And ladies and gentlemen, working together, we will make the most of all of our resources. We will live up to our challenge.

As we look at our state, its people and its resources, we can be proud of the progress we have made in the last four years:

- proud of the help we have given our senior citizens and our local communities;
- proud of the progress we have made toward completing our interstate highways and improving our secondary roads;
- proud of our successes in the fight for coal;
- proud of the progress of our teachers and educators in preparing our young people for lives as active and productive citizens;
- and proud that the name West Virginia is now recognized in corporate centers around the world
- giving us the chance to attract new business and new jobs.

But I think we all sense that this progress is only the beginning.

We can be especially proud - and especially hopeful - because the work of the last four years is more than just the groundwork for the next term in office.

Rather, the last four years are a prelude to an era of progress that will extend far beyond the tenure of my Governorship.

Four years ago, we agreed that West Virginia's time had come.

Today, we can be sure that our destiny is clearer than ever.

The success - indeed, the glory, that West Virginians have deserved for so long - is closer than ever to us.

In fact, ladies and gentlemen, we enter now a decade of destiny.

In this decade of destiny, we can be sure that our state's potential will be recognized by others - and that all our people will share in the benefits to come.

In this decade of destiny, more than ever before, we can be sure that our natural resources will be nationally and internationally recognized - and that coal production and employment in our coal mines and coal-related industries will increase.

And in this decade of destiny, more than ever before, we know we can use our energy base - coal and oil and natural gas - to build a strong economy, to bring in new business and jobs, and to help our local businesses to expand.

This, in turn, will help provide revenues we need to aid our elderly, teach our children, and support the state services West Virginians need and deserve.

Even now, on the threshold of our destiny, we know all our problems will not go away.

Life in this decade will not always be easy.

Our people - above all others, perhaps - understand the nature of adversity - especially economic adversity - and know what it takes to overcome the uncertainties of a weakened national economy.

But if in the past we have walked together, worked together, and struggled together, toward a distant goal - today, we can honestly affirm that our goal is clearly in sight.

Today, as we recommit ourselves to the tasks ahead, we know that our destiny will come in time for this generation of West Virginians to share in its rewards.

That knowledge, that certainty, that reality, is strong enough to warm us even on this January day - and clear enough to guide us as we build our future over the next four years.

In a few short weeks, I will present my plan for our future to the legislature and to our people.

That plan will outline in detail how I think we can best proceed toward our goals.

Then the work of turning destiny into reality will begin anew.

I do not expect all West Virginians to agree with everything I say, but I do look forward to working with our legislature, our fine state employees, and all of our citizens as we bring West Virginia's destiny still closer.

I believe we should be urged on by the spirit expressed by William Jennings Bryan when he said:

Destiny is not a matter of chance;

It is a matter of choice;

It is not a thing to be awaited;

It is a thing to be achieved.

I can assure you that the effort to help our state achieve its destiny will command every ounce of energy, determination, and commitment I possess - every day of the next four years.

While these ceremonies are traditionally an occasion of state, I feel I am truly among family and friends, and I ask your indulgence as I close on a personal note.

I have been blessed many times over in my lifetime.

I was blessed to be born into one of America's most distinguished and fortunate families.

I have been blessed with loving and strong parents.

And for almost fourteen years, I have been blessed with the love and support of a beautiful wife and partner, Sharon - and our marriage has been blessed in turn with four wonderful children.

But none of these blessings mean more to me than the blessing of being a West Virginian - and being twice chosen as the leader of West Virginians.

Over the past years, you have welcomed me into your communities and into your homes, and even those who could not agree with my cause greeted me with warmth and hospitality.

That means something very special to me - and I am deeply grateful.

I thank you - and I ask God's richest blessings upon you - and upon all West Virginians as our state moves into this decade of destiny.