

Inaugural Address of Governor Joe Manchin III

January 19, 2009

Four years ago, I stood before you with a promise.

A promise that West Virginia would no longer stand still while the rest of the world raced by.

A promise that we would do away with the old divisions and begin a new kind of politics - with Democrats, Republicans and Independents, members of the Mountain Party and members of no party - all of us working together to build a New West Virginia.

A promise that our best days were still ahead of us, our greatest strengths still within us, and that, together, we could overcome any challenges we face to create a bright future for our children and grandchildren.

Four years later, I am honored and humbled to stand here once again as your governor.

We still have a long journey ahead of us, but we have already traveled a great distance.

And none of it would have been possible without you, the people of West Virginia. As I've always said, I believe in you more than you believe in yourselves.

I want to thank the thousands of state employees who get up every morning, eager to work hard to make life better for all of us in West Virginia. Thank you for your dedication and your service.

I want to thank all the public servants who serve our state with honor and pride, including our two distinguished U.S. Senators, Sen. Robert C. Byrd and Sen. Jay Rockefeller; our representatives in Washington, Congressman Nick Rahall, Congressman Alan Mollohan, and Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito; the justices of our Supreme Court; members of our Board of Public Works; and all our legislators, especially President of the State Senate Earl Ray Tomblin and Speaker of the House of Delegates Rick Thompson.

I'd also like to take a moment to remember a dear friend we lost last year. Governor Cecil H. Underwood dedicated his life to serving the people of West Virginia. He led with fairness, courage, and deep pride in his home state. He will be missed, but never forgotten.

On a personal note, I wouldn't be here today without my tremendous staff and campaign volunteers. I am so grateful for your belief in me and your continued commitment to building a better West Virginia.

And I don't know where I'd be without my family. I am so blessed to have their love and their support. I want to thank my wonderful mother, Mary Manchin, my brothers and sisters, Janet, John, Paula and Rocky, my children Heather, Joseph and Brooke and my six wonderful grandchildren, Joey, Kelsey, Sophie, Chloe, Madeline and Jack.

And thank you to my incredible wife, the love of my life, my partner in everything, Gayle Manchin, who has served West Virginia with pride and grace as your first lady.

Today - as we celebrate the 80th birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., and on the eve of the inauguration of our next president, Barack Obama - we are reminded that this is a country where the future is wide open - where anything is possible. And we are also reminded of our debt to those who came before us.

Three years ago today, two men died in the fire at the Aracoma Alma Mine. Just three weeks before that, 12 men died in the explosions at the Sago Mine. None of us will ever forget that terrible time. We mourned together, and then we stood, united together, and vowed to honor their memory by doing everything we could to eliminate mining deaths in every corner of our state. Today, we have made progress, but we still have more to do -- and we will not rest until we meet this sacred responsibility to our neighbors and fellow West Virginians and, most importantly, to the memory of those we lost.

I learned recently that the word "inauguration" comes from the Latin word "augur," meaning "omen." Apparently, before they installed their new leaders, the Romans would wait for good omens to appear. Only then would they venture into a new era.

Today, in West Virginia, we see good omens all around us. Signs of progress, signs of strength, and signs of new beginnings.

In the four years since I became your governor, an economic transformation has begun in West Virginia. We've created 23,000 new jobs and experienced the lowest unemployment in our history. Last summer, we led the nation in economic growth. Businesses have invested billions here in West Virginia. We've cut taxes on families, reformed government, strengthened our schools and health care, and improved services to all of our veterans and seniors.

It's true that there are new obstacles on the horizon. Our nation is facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We can see the effects everywhere - in grim balance sheets and falling home values, in our parents' shrinking retirement accounts and in the rising costs of just about everything. And our economists tell us it may get worse before it gets better.

We acknowledge these difficult facts; it would be foolish to deny them. But we are not discouraged by them. Four years ago, we set out on a long-term course for prosperity and growth. That journey may be rocky, but we're still on the right path.

And we can take confidence in our financial position. It is sound. Because of our fiscal discipline over the last four years, we are entering this period of uncertainty on more solid footing than many other states. Ten years ago, our unemployment rate was the highest in the country. Today, it is consistently better than the national average. And after three straight years of surpluses, our budget outlook is still strong.

We enter this new year with a clear view of the challenges ahead, a shared vision for our future, and confidence in the advantages we have earned, through our hard work and our sound planning.

Now, let us commit to continuing on the course we set four years ago. Let us commit to building a new West Virginia.

It is not enough to simply call something "new." We all know that. The river which cuts across half of our great state is the second-oldest river in the world and we still call it the New River.

A new West Virginia requires a renewed commitment.

So let us commit to creating and protecting more jobs, by attracting new employers to invest in West Virginia, helping our homegrown companies expand, and boosting our entrepreneurs.

Let us commit to seeking affordable, high-quality health care for every working West Virginian. This will make our workers more productive and our companies more competitive. But even more importantly, it will give hundreds of thousands of our neighbors better lives.

Let us commit to strengthening our education system. The jobs of the future will go not to the places with the richest land or most abundant resources, but the places with the richest minds. The only way our children will be able to compete and thrive in this global economy is if we give them a world-class education.

And let us commit to investing in the energy of the future. West Virginians know energy better than almost anyone. This has been our expertise for generations, and we can't let it go now. That means finding more efficient sources of energy. It means using natural gas, and renewable alternatives like wind, solar, hydro and biofuels.

And it means coal - coal that's safer than nuclear energy, cheaper than solar power and, unlike most of our oil, which comes from the Middle East, coal comes from right here in West Virginia.

We have the opportunity to use coal, through a much cleaner process, to help our nation become more secure through energy independence. And West Virginia has the researchers with the knowledge to make it happen. Because, our greatest resource isn't in our land, it's in our people.

If we tap that resource, the progress we have made will be just the beginning.

As your governor, I've had the chance to talk to people from every corner of the world about our state - the beauty of our mountains, the pride of our people, the strength of our ties to the land, to our history and, most importantly, to each other.

As a salesperson, I have the greatest job in the world - because I have the best product to sell: the State of West Virginia and our people.

We have reason to be proud of our past. West Virginia has an extraordinary story. And it still has lessons for us now, as we look forward to the years to come.

West Virginia has played a major role in making America strong. The coal that our ancestors mined far beneath these mountains fueled the Industrial Revolution. It stoked the steel factories that rose up all over America. The railroads that crisscrossed the nation the Navy ships that flew our colors during the world wars they were all powered by West Virginia coal.

And when it came time to go to war, it wasn't just West Virginia coal powering the armies of Democracy it was West Virginians themselves - serving and sacrificing in far greater percentages than many other states.

We made America strong and we kept America strong.

We did it before. We can do it again.

As I look into the future, I do see a New West Virginia. One that is, once again, a hub of global industry and trade.

I see a New West Virginia that once again draws people from around the world, not only for its natural beauty and strong communities, but also for its high-tech jobs, first-class schools and compassionate services.

I see a New West Virginia that once again leads an energy revolution that will keep this nation safe and bring unprecedented prosperity to our state and our country.

If we want to live and work and raise our families in a New West Virginia, then we must build it together.

That is the task we took up four years ago, and it is the task we rededicate ourselves to today.

With hard workers, strong families, strong communities, and the right investment - while others hunker down in the face of this economic storm we'll be prepared to take it head on.

And if we do that, we won't just be the envy of America we'll be a model for the entire world.

So once again West Virginians, let's do what we do best. Let's roll up our sleeves and let's get to work!

Thank you, God bless you, may God save the great state of West Virginia, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.