

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Gaston Caperton**

**January 18, 1993**

Mr. President; Mr. Speaker; honorable Justices of the Supreme Court; distinguished members of the most powerful Congressional Delegation in America; Senator Robert Byrd; Senator Jay Rockefeller; Congressman Nick Rahall; Congressman Alan Mollohan; Congressman Bob Wise; members of the Board of Public Works; members of the Legislature; Reverend Clergy; distinguished guests; my fellow West Virginians:

When I was growing up, I had only one hero. My hero took me to work with him. He worked hard, liked the people he worked with, and they, in turn, liked and respected him. My hero took me to lots of football and basketball games. His enthusiasm and unflinching loyalty were contagious. Sunday mornings were special, too. My hero always made me pancakes for breakfast and took me to Sunday School, and, after that, we went to church.

Watching my hero, I learned his values: honesty, compassion, respect for hard work, love of God, love of West Virginia, family, friends, and a commitment to making the community a better place to live.

My hero was my Dad.

Four years ago, when I stood here as your newly elected governor, my Dad stood here with me. He knew my values. He understood my dreams for this state and for the people we both loved so deeply.

Four years ago, with enormous enthusiasm, hope, and determination you and I began putting West Virginia on the road to recovery. We knew that it would take unprecedented effort from all of us, but it would be worth it. And it has been worth it.

Today, four years later, my father's seat is empty. But his values live on in me. His spirit inspires my vision. My dreams for West Virginia remain undaunted.

Four years ago, you gave me the opportunity to make those dreams a reality. Today, I thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart for giving me the opportunity to continue meeting your challenge for change!

I'd like to tell you a story of a traveler from Italy who came to a small French town to see the great cathedral that was being built there - a structure which would take a century to complete. Arriving at the end of the day, he went to the site just as the workers were leaving for home.

He asked one man, covered with dust, what he did there. The man replied that he was a stonemason. He spent his days carving rocks. A woman, when asked, said she was a glassblower who spent her days making slabs of colored glass. Still another worker replied that he was a blacksmith who pounded iron for a living.

Wandering into the deepening gloom of the unfinished edifice, the traveler came upon an older man, armed with a broom, sweeping up the stone chips and wood shavings and broken glass from the day's work. "What are you doing?" the traveler asked.

The man paused, leaning on his broom and looking up toward the high arches - then replied, "Me? I'm building a cathedral for the Glory of Almighty God!"

The people of that small village knew that they had started something they would never see completed. They were building something larger than themselves. They had a magnificent vision.

Today, molded by four years of experience as your governor, I see more clearly, feel more deeply, and understand more fully the problems and pain of so many West Virginians. But like that man pushing the broom, I am inspired by the vision of the West Virginia we are building together. And, I am inspired by those who are building West Virginia. Our builder's names may never appear in the history books. They will have no statues - no medals. But they will be our builders!

Beverly Hoffmaster, a schoolteacher from Martinsburg, isn't just teaching the 3rd grade, she is preparing our next generation to lead us into the future.

Jackie Tharpe, a volunteer nurse's aide in Fayette County, isn't just treating illnesses, she is establishing a foundation of better health for all our citizens.

Santo Santoro, a steelworker from Follansbee, isn't just fabricating new metal, he is building our bridges to the future.

Brian Joseph and Elizabeth Kraftician, Wheeling entrepreneurs, aren't just building a business, they are providing jobs and progress for West Virginia's future.

Con Hoke, a coal miner from Lincoln County, isn't just digging coal, he is creating the energy which will power our homes and industries well into the 21st century.

Anita Adkins a longtime state employee from Welch, isn't just processing data, she is working harder and working smarter to provide our neediest citizens with the help they need.

And Joe Stanislawczyk of Keyser, didn't just work for the state of West Virginia, but his special way of serving inspired every single human being who knew him.

These men and women, like the man pushing the broom, aren't just doing their jobs - they are meeting our challenge of change. Their work is creating the vision that binds us together. And what is my vision of West Virginia?

My vision is an inspired West Virginia which reflects the strength of our people and erases our self-doubt.

An economy which creates opportunities for all West Virginians to support themselves, their families, and their communities; a government which reflects the values of our people: honesty, compassion, and pride in their performance; a school system which prepares our children to

compete in the 21st century while strengthening our traditional mountaineer values; a health care system which is accessible and affordable to every West Virginian; an environment which includes newfound respect and appreciation for our mountains and valleys as treasures for us all to enjoy, appreciate, and protect. And most of all, my vision is of a West Virginia which is a shining beacon to America and the world; an example of what a courageous, compassionate, and determined people can achieve.

Four years ago, we faced a crisis of unparalleled proportion, and because we shared a vision and a commitment, we were willing to make the sacrifices, face the tough choices, and bear the heavy burden of leadership.

Today, the danger we face lies not in a mountain of unpaid bills and tax refunds. Today, we face the danger that we are so weary from correcting the sins of the past that we may accept the status quo, and fail to meet our continuing challenge for change. The danger is that we may lose our vision and the inspiration it gives us.

Yes, the storm of crisis has subsided. But the needs of our people are still enormous. This is our challenge for change!

We must face the future, seize the opportunities. We must not rest until no West Virginians have been forced to leave their homes to find work in other states. This is our challenge for change! We must not rest until West Virginians are treated with the respect they deserve by other Americans. This is our challenge for change!

We must not rest until those outsiders who benefit from the wealth generated by our abundant resources return their fair share back to the people of West Virginia. This is our challenge for change!

And we must not rest until misdirected self-interest, apathy, defeatism, and low expectation are nothing but fading memories. This is our challenge for change!

Let the word go forth today, to friend and foe alike, that we will not return to the days of corrupt government, poor schools, bad roads, environmental ruin, and inadequate health care. Let this be the generation which shares a vision of an inspired West Virginia, rejects the ways of the past, and accepts our challenge for change!

God bless you.