

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Matthew M Neely**

**January 13, 1941**

Governor Holt, distinguished visitors, and fellow citizens:

At the ballot box last November the people of West Virginia, for the third consecutive time, deliberately and decisively ordained that the government of the state should be conducted by the duly chosen representatives of the historic Democratic Party.

A free people may capriciously change an administration. But they seldom, if ever, again and again capriciously continue a political party in power. Therefore, we construe the recent election returns to mean that the people approve the democratic achievements of the past, and desire that during the next four years their governmental problems shall be solved in accordance with the formula and philosophy of the party of Jefferson.

Those of us who are entering upon the execution of the trust with which we have been honored are not unmindful of the weight of the responsibilities that are about to devolve upon us, or of the importance of satisfying all reasonable expectations that the government be administered so that it will promote the welfare of all the people of the state.

But regardless of the expectations of today and the responsibilities of tomorrow, let us rejoice in the realization that in this breathless epoch of unequalled peril to all who hate tyranny and love liberty our nation and our state are at peace with all the world; that no heartless dictator's merciless hosts daily trample American soil, nightly bomb American industries, rain destruction on American cities or death on American homes.

But we can not ignore the fact that in the eastern half of the world warfare is raging on a stupendous scale, in horrifying forms and with appalling results. It has profoundly affected the governmental, industrial, and social life of every community in Christendom. It dominates the radio broadcasts, the headline news, and all our activities and plans and thoughts and hopes. This gruesome World War, like its desolating predecessor, unhappily threatens not only our national security and peace, but the perpetuity of democratic government, the maintenance of civil rights and the preservation of religious liberty wherever these blessings still survive. The record-breaking appropriations which the federal government is making for national defense impressively warn us that extraordinary danger is at our very door.

West Virginia is an important part of the nation. She could not, if she would, isolate herself from the rest of the union either in peace or war. She would not, if she could, in this time of peril, serve or sacrifice less than her utmost to aid the federal government in defending the rights of the American people to life and liberty and happiness in accordance with their own ideals.

The state's aeronautical accessibility from the Atlantic coast, and the probability that if aggression is attempted in the near future it will come from that quarter; our profusion of natural resources that are indispensable in time of war, and our plenitude of industrial capacity to produce military equipment and naval supplies - all signify that West Virginia's role will be a

highly important one during the continuation of the stirring events that are staggering civilization and creating conditions that will vitally affect this country for more than a thousand years.

In this crisis great is West Virginia's opportunity to expand her industries, help to perfect national defense and aid in preserving the form of government under which this nation has become wealthier, freer, and happier than any of the ideal republics of which theorists have ever written or visionaries have ever dreamed.

By fully improving this unusual opportunity, we can immeasurably increase our prosperity, gratify those who are perfecting national defense, and cause every loyal West Virginian's heart to beat with patriotic pride.

In order to make our contribution to national security most effectual, we must have state-wide peace. Strife in any part of the country would retard defense work and indicate weakness that might tend to encourage the notorious aggressors of the old world to make war on the people of the new.

The peace of which we are speaking does not mean simply the absence of armed conflict, or freedom from the dismay of ambushes and sieges and battles. It is the peace that springs from wholehearted cooperation between capital and labor; between employer and employee; between the government on the one hand and all legitimate private business on the other - the peace that can be completely realized only by obedience to the Golden Rule.

### **Unemployment and Labor**

Next in importance to the consummation of our defense program, is the problem of unemployment, which persistently appeals to all thinking men and women for its solution. Humanitarian impulses alone should impel us to do everything in our power to provide every qualified, willing worker in the state an opportunity to exchange his labor for wages sufficient to maintain himself and those dependent upon him, in keeping with the generally recognized high standards of American life. But selfish motives also admonish us to discharge this duty, because the taxpayers must provide all the money that is spent by governmental agencies for the relief of those who, as the result of their unemployment, are unable to support themselves. Therefore, to provide work for the idle is to lighten the taxpayers' load.

West Virginia is a great industrial state. The compensation of the toiler is habitually spent with the farmers, merchants, builders and all others who supply the necessaries and comforts of modern civilization. Thus the prosperity of labor is indispensable to the prosperity of all the rest of the people, and must, as far as possible, be assured.

The natural right of the toilers to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing has become an enforceable legal right by virtue of the National Labor Relations Law. West Virginia should enact legislation that will provide employees in intrastate commerce protection similar to that which the workers in commerce between the states now enjoy under federal law.

Existing hour and wage standards must be protected. Proper housing and sanitary conditions must be established and maintained. The Workmen's Compensation law should be amended so as to include occupational diseases; and should be so administered that it will provide maximum protection for the toilers and their families at minimum cost.

The Mining Department should endeavor to provide greater safety for the lives of the miners and additional security for the operators' property. We must, to the limit of possibility, prevent mine disasters that cause vast financial losses and shocking destruction of human life.

### **Home Ownership**

The time is ripe to begin to strive for conditions under which every worthy, capable toiler and tenant may ultimately become the owner of a home - the most precious and inspiring material object of human desire. Selfish interest unites with humanitarian impulse in urging this achievement, because home ownership is one of the most powerful incentives to patriotism, and the preservation of the democracy which we cherish as a priceless blessing, and purpose to defend against all its enemies who hate it and stigmatize it as the capitalistic form of government.

To the owners of American homes the crack brained champions of dangerous foreign isms and the vicious advocates of the overthrow of democracy by violent means will proclaim their revolutionary fallacies and preach their gospel of bloodshed in vain.

Benevolence admonishes, expediency requires and duty demands that social workers, financiers, business men and all appropriate governmental agencies vigorously endeavor to make the percentage of our home owning population much greater than it has ever been.

### **The Aged and the Needy**

Old age, even in the most favorable environment, is necessarily destitute of much of the pleasure, many of the hopes and the most of the ambitions of early life. In destitution and disease, old age usually grows melancholy and burdensome, and life becomes a sentence to be served rather than a blessing to be enjoyed.

The present federal social security law provides a measure of relief for not only the needy old, but also for all other innocent, necessitous victims of unemployment, underprivilege, poverty and disease. But the amount of federal relief depends upon the financial cooperation of the state in which the relief is dispensed. So far West Virginia has not sufficiently cared for her needy, or even appropriated enough for relief to enable her to pay those in want the full amount that the federal government offers to help supply. In the classification of states with reference to the liberality with which they provide for their needy old, West Virginia is - to our severe reproach and deep regret - the thirty-fifth from the head of the list. This unseemly low standard of social security service must be raised at once.

To the limit of compatibility with the general good, we must increase our relief until every needy worthy person in the state shall have been delivered from the pangs of hunger, the misery of

destitution and the haunting fear that the afflictions of tomorrow may be even more intolerable than the misfortunes of today.

Wherever the Holy Bible is read the good Samaritan of the parable will forever live in high esteem because he satisfied the wants and alleviated the suffering of one unfortunate, nameless man. Let us emulate this good example on a large scale and endeavor to banish distress from every West Virginia community and exile destitution from every West Virginia home.

## **Youth**

Of all the people, of any time or place, the youth are, in many respects, the most important. The old and the middle aged have had their chance. They now live largely in the recollections of the past. But the young live in the reality of the present and the hope of golden opportunities in the years to come. With much greater apprehension than assurance our youth are starting on their hazardous journey through a world that is filled with perplexities, torn with strife and darkened by the clouds of war.

In the United States more than four million deserving young men and women are seeking employment in vain. Lack of public land - vast tracts of which could once be had for the asking; constantly increasing efficiency in production; the progressive, persistent mechanization of industry, and the consequent decrease of demand for manual labor have jointly closed to the young people of the present innumerable doors of opportunity that were open wide to their fathers and mothers fifty years ago.

It seems but yesterday that we were inviting the common laborers of every country in Europe to come here to work in our mines, our factories and our fields. Formerly our difficulty was to find workers for our jobs. Our present problem is to find jobs for our idle women and men. Our failure to solve this problem would discourage American youth and tend to make them contemptuous of the captains of industry, the officials of the government and all others who might be considered responsible for the unsatisfactory conditions of the country. Frustrated young men and women will sooner or later revolt against an order which compels them to live in want and condemns them to die in despair.

The federal government through the National Youth Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps has done much to enlarge and brighten the horizon of the young people of the nation. But as long as more than four million of our youth are unemployed, much more must be done to rescue them from the slough of despond, and restore their confidence in their country, their opportunities and themselves.

Recently a high school graduating class marched to its commencement exercises under banners bearing the inscription: "WPA - here we come!" If the despondency manifested by this incident should generally afflict American youth, the nation's future would become as dark as night and as alarming as an army with banners. We must intensify our efforts to provide every capable, deserving young man and woman in the state an opportunity to become a part of a hopeful, eager army that is marching to worthy industrial achievements and famous professional victories instead of to heartbreaking failures and ignominious defeats.

Until private industry fully absorbs our jobless youth, they must be afforded adequate training and employment at governmental expense.

### **Natural Resources and Conservation**

West Virginia was originally fabulously rich in natural resources. Unfortunately untold millions of dollars worth of these have been wasted. Much of our land that is now practically worthless was once fertile, and covered with trees that were immensely valuable, not only as timber, but also as nature's preventives of floods and erosion of the soil. But the fertility of vast areas has been washed from the state and irretrievably carried to the Gulf and the ocean. Timber that was once so abundant and so dense that the sunshine could not penetrate its foliage has, like the Indians and the buffaloes, vanished away.

There is ample justification for the charge that for every ton of coal that was utilized in the early days of our mining industry more than a half a ton of equally valuable coal was lost by improper methods of production.

In the exploitation of our oil fields, we wasted natural gas, worth more than all the ransoms ever paid for captive kings, before we learned the importance of its conservation.

A few decades ago wild life of infinite variety and inestimable value flourished all over the territory that is now West Virginia. Our forests and fields were full of game; our streams were alive with the finest species of fish; wild fowls were as countless as the sands of the sea. But with the greed of the man in the fable who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs, we recklessly destroyed much of our animate and inanimate wealth without realizing the consequence of our folly.

Manifestly, exhausted gas wells can not be replenished. Wasted coal deposits can not be restored. But fortunately impoverished land can be reclaimed; denuded areas can be reforested; unnecessary stream pollution can be prevented; and in our purified water courses fish can be made to thrive. All these things the state must endeavor to do. For our posterity and ourselves, we must restore as much as possible of the matchless heritage which we wasted as improvidently as the base Indian who threw away a pearl that was richer than all his tribe.

It is, of course, desirable that we utilize as fully as necessary the remaining resources with which nature has blessed us.

But we should do this in accordance with scientific methods that will be conducive to conservation instead of annihilation. Tens of thousands of acres of West Virginia land must be reforested; tens of thousands of acres of soil must be reclaimed; our streams must be purified and restocked with fish; our fields must once more be filled with wild life, particularly of the kinds that prey on pests and of the species known as game. And when sufficient soil and forests and wild life have been regained we must thereafter plant a young tree for every old one that is severed; we must, by scientific methods of farming, preserve the productivity of the soil; we must protect our fish and bird and animal life so that it will never be threatened with extinction again.

If to West Virginia scenery, which is surpassing diversified and transcendently beautiful, we add the lure of fully restored forests, fish and game, the state will eventually become a happy hunting ground for the sportsman; a paradise for the tourist; and the home of prosperity more abundant than we have ever known.

### **Public Education**

Our system of free education is indispensable to the maintenance of all the good that we have accomplished in the past and all the best that we hope to achieve in the future. The assertion that "Education is the cheap defense of nations" is as true now as it was when it was first made by the illustrious Edmund Burke. The great Horace Mann spoke wisely when he said: "Education is our only political safety. Outside of this ark all is deluge."

A nine month term of elementary school, conducted by thoroughly trained teachers, and the best obtainable textbooks should be provided all the school children of the state at public expense.

In recent years discoveries, inventions and machinery have revolutionized our manner of life and created widespread demands for specialists in every profession, and skilled workmen in every industry. For the purpose of serving youth and satisfying these demands, education as practicable as the multiplication table and as modern as this afternoon must be made as available to the boys and girls of West Virginia as the air they breathe.

In order to render our educational system most effective, teachers' salaries should be made at least as attractive as the highest of those paid by the state in any other profession for comparable terms and hours of service. High standards of preparation for teachers can not be attained without salaries sufficient to justify the great expenditure of time, energy and money which such preparation requires. An adequate, equitable system of retirement for teachers should be promptly established. Obviously the teachers should make reasonable contributions to their retirement fund.

School teachers must be completely protected against every kind of political pressure. Members of boards of education should be elected on non-partisan ballots to the end that the public school system be absolutely free from the blight of political influence and the bane of political control.

Unhappily, West Virginia is not one of the leading states in the field of higher education. She should promptly take her place in the front rank of the procession of learning.

Our high schools and teachers colleges should be supplied adequate, modern buildings and equipment and sufficient staffs of competent teachers to afford the young people of the state educational opportunities as good as the best in the land.

The West Virginia University should be so expanded and perfected that it would be unnecessary for anyone in the state to go abroad for technical or professional training. It should be enabled to provide finished education in the fine and useful arts, and in the liberal and lucrative sciences equal to that obtainable in any other institution of learning in the United States. The accomplishment of this objective would yearly cause many West Virginia students to seek their higher education at Morgantown instead of entering the Universities of other states.

Let us stimulate our efforts to solve our problems in the field of learning by frequently recalling the following quotation from one of the famous McGuffey Readers: "We must educate! or we must perish by our own prosperity."

## **Farmers**

The farmers have suffered more financial and economic losses since the beginning of the 1929 panic than any other class except the industrial workers. In the early days of the depression neither livestock nor crops could be sold for enough to cover the cost of their production. Since 1928 tens of thousands of West Virginia farms have been sold for taxes and their former owners have been reduced to poverty.

During the last eight years the federal government has lent those engaged in agriculture record-breaking aid in a vigorous endeavor to relieve their distress. Contemporaneously West Virginia has, by appropriate legislation, reduced the taxes on farms and homes approximately fifty per cent, and thus lifted a heavy burden from the backs of those who till the soil.

All the benefits of tax reduction which the farmers now enjoy must be preserved. But further aid is required.

The state should fully cooperate with the federal government in constructing and maintaining farm to market roads; and should match federal appropriations for the Experiment Station and its Extension Service.

The College of Agriculture should be provided with adequate buildings and equipment and additional farm land for experimental purposes.

Proper appropriations should be made for the continuance of the work of the Soil Conservation Commission.

Courses should be instituted in the College of Agriculture for the training of leaders in cooperative buying and selling and for the instruction of game technicians to teach farmers the value of wild life as a supplement to their farm crops.

The problem of providing proper hospital facilities and adequate medical care for the farm population of isolated sections upon a low cost basis should be promptly given careful consideration.

## **Human Safety**

Human life is the state's most precious asset. It is being needlessly and shamefully sacrificed every day in the year. Our main travelled roads on holidays and at other times of unusual congestion are as dangerous as battlefields. The casualty lists of some of our industries are unpleasantly reminiscent of those of World War days.

In West Virginia last year three hundred ninety-one persons were accidentally killed and two thousand were injured on the highways, while in our industries four hundred eighty-nine were killed and thirty-seven thousand seven hundred were injured.

For the purpose of arousing ourselves to the necessity of more effectually protecting the life and the limbs of the people of the state, let us translate these cold inanimate figures into terms of flesh and blood. And behold, in imagination, many wives who have been made widows; many children who have been made orphans; multitudes who have been hopelessly maimed pass before us in melancholy review. These casualties of carelessness mean additional burdens of taxes with which to provide relief for dependent women and children and an army of cripples that must hobble in futility, misery and regret to the grave.

The state must fully cooperate with every legitimate agency that is promoting human safety. A sweeping reduction in casualties which result from preventable accidents is an imperative necessity with which we are face to face. Every safety organization should intensify its efforts not only to protect all who are necessarily exposed to unusual danger, but also to reform the reckless and save them from the disastrous consequences of their own folly, until West Virginia shall have become one of the safest states in the union.

### **Political Corruption**

Fraudulent campaign practices and violations of both the spirit and the letter of election laws by all prominent political parties are believed to be frequent, deliberate and irreparably injurious to good government.

With amazement we have just learned from the press that in the recent campaign the two major political parties exceeded the legal limits of expenditures by more than fourteen million dollars. Doubtless this sum fails by many millions to indicate the full extent of the defiance of the law. To ignore or approve such campaign extravagance would be to encourage the abandonment of democratic government for plutocratic control.

Public officials who owe their election to the improper use of money or power are prone to dedicate their official services to the few by whom the money or the power was supplied. In such cases the general welfare is neglected, the people are forgotten, patriotism wanes, corruption thrives and the very foundation of good government is impaired.

Our laws must be so strengthened and enforced that fraudulent registration, vote selling, vote buying and election fixing will be effectively prohibited from debauching the people, perverting their government and disgracing the state.

Thus we have indicated a few of the many important tasks with which we are confronted upon the threshold of this new governmental era. There are many other matters that require official action. The more important of these are specified in a widely published twenty-one point program proposed by me last May, which is too long for discussion on this occasion. But since this program was apparently approved by the voters both in the primary and in the general election, it is my hope that the Legislature will promptly make it a part of the law of the state.

We now unconditionally address ourselves to the performance of the duties that beckon us, and wholeheartedly dedicate ourselves to the lofty enterprise of serving to the limit of our ability every man, every woman and every child in West Virginia.



Without the constant guidance of Divine Providence and the unstinted support of all the people, we can not even hope to succeed. But with the blessings of Almighty God for which we devoutly pray and the loyal cooperation of every patriot for which we fervently plead, we can not, we will not fail.