

Inaugural Address of Governor William E. Glasscock

March 4, 1909

Friends and Fellow Citizens of West Virginia:

I am here to assume the duties and responsibilities of the highest executive office within the gift of the people of my native state. I was not selected from among your number to be your Chief Executive for the next four years because of any peculiar or special qualifications I possess, because there are others as worthy and capable as I am. There are many good citizens of this State who would discharge the duties of the responsible position to which I have been called, if they had the opportunity, as honestly, fearlessly, faithfully and efficiently as I can hope to do. But having been named by the duly constituted authority as the standard bearer of one of the great political parties a majority of the people of the State declared by their verdict on November 3, 1908, that they believe in the policies and principles of the political organization to which I belong. I take it that verdict, also means the people of the State believe that in the next four years, as in the past, we will have good government economically administered. And this leads to the inquiry, what is good government?

The anarchist says the best thing for society is no government at all. The lawless say the best government is one which you can obey or violate just as may best suit you. The selfish man says government is best when he gets most out of it, regardless of how it affects his neighbors and fellow-citizens. The extremist says government cannot be good unless you forget and abandon all other things and employ all your time, energy and ability in trying to promulgate sonic fad or fancy, which, if successfully done might result in business stagnation or unsettle and disturb well established laws, laws that may have proved their wisdom and beneficence by a decade or more of trial.

We are told on the one hand that the States have delegated too much authority to the National Government and on the other that if the Federal authority could be extended along certain lines it would be better for both the State and the Nation.

There must be organized government, otherwise society would be in a state of confusion and anarchy. Government is the machinery invoked and devised by man for his benefit and protection. Government was made for the people and not the people for the government. Good government inspires confidence, encourages business, make for the contentment and happiness of the people and promotes prosperity. Good government insures the protection of life, liberty and property, the right to acquire and hold property and enjoy the fruits of one's industry, labor and thrift. Good government means the happiness, prosperity, success and welfare of the people.

How to bring about good government should be the aim of the highest statesmanship. It is the problem of the centuries. The evolution of society works continually towards good government. Man surrenders some of his natural rights that he may secure through government better protection and larger rights.

The chief aim of good government should be to secure to the individual the largest measure of liberty and protection and the enjoyment of the fruits of his labor.

This is not the time and place to discuss generally good government, or how it shall be best promoted and secured, nor to discuss policies or what my purposes may be in the administration of the highest office to which I have been elected and upon the duties of which I am about to enter. These will come up at the next session of our legislature. I will then try to make plain what I conceive to be the wisest and best policy to secure good government to the people of our State.

It will not be amiss, however, for me to say now that good government will compel all things necessary to making better, conditions and the welfare of the people. Looking towards good government, among the things now engaging the attention of the people, is the proper regulation of railroads, trusts and the great corporate combinations, not only in the interest of the people, but in their own interest. I believe in regulation, but not in interference with the proper business management of railroads and the great corporations. The people must be protected against the oppression and abuses of railroads, trust and corporate combinations and generally against corporate and individual greed. The limit of regulation however, should be to correct and prevent wrongs and abuses of all kinds, I do not want to be understood as holding that a business is necessarily bad because carried on by a corporation. All depends upon the nature of the business and the manner of conducting it.

The State needs development, increased population, more capital, more investments, more railroads, and in order to get those things she must be just and fair to all interests.

Under good government, the State will compel and guarantee pure elections, a free ballot, no unlawful use of money in elections, and see to it that the free, unbiased will of the people at all times decides all elections.

To have good government there should be just and fair taxation; and the burdens of taxation should rest on all property, equally and alike. No property owner should escape bearing his full and fair share of taxation.

In my judgment the greatest obstacle in the way of arriving at a wise and proper conclusion as to what is and what is not good government is selfishness. If we could forget self when studying this question and think only of what is best for others, we would be materially aided in our attempt to solve the question.

I would not have you think that I believe I have solved the question which has been the subject of the best thought of the greatest and best men the world has produced. Far from it. I do believe, however, there are some things that are fundamental and without which good government is impossible. No free government, such as ours, can long exist unless we help the helpless. And when we help them intelligently and to the best of curability we are materially aiding in the establishment of good government. If the insane, the deaf, the blind, the unfortunate from whatever cause are humanely and intelligently cared for; if our boys and girls are given all the advantages, educationally and otherwise, that a great State like ours is capable of given them; if the weak are protected against the strong, and the law abiding against the vicious and lawless; in short, if government is so administered as to do the greatest good to the greatest number, then and only then are we discharging our full duty to ourselves and to our State.

You say you not only want good government but you want it; economically administered. In other words, you would have it managed or conducted, with frugality, guarding against waste on unnecessary expense. I interpret that to mean you would have the smallest number of well paid officers, agents, servants, or employees consistent with the proper and efficient administration of public affairs. Your representatives and servants should be well paid because in that way only can you secure intelligent, capable, economical and faithful services.

Frugality, I understand to mean, "that careful management of anything valuable which expends nothing unnecessarily and applies what is used to a profitable purpose." Frugality does not mean, as I understand it, that our unfortunate wards shall be kept on the least possible sum of money, or that our boys and girls shall be given only such educational advantages as can be had by the expenditure of a niggardly sum of money. Every good West Virginian believes in giving to these unfortunate people every comfort, every enjoyment and every pleasure that money can buy and the State can afford. He also believes in giving to our boys and girls school privileges and advantages equal to those given to the boys and girls of any State in the Union. But we must not forget that our eleemosynary institutions are being kept and maintained for the benefit of the unfortunate inmates thereof to whom the State owes comfortable subsistence, and that those in charge of these institutions are simply servants of the people, charged with the duty of rendering to these people the greatest aid, the most pleasure and happiness possible with the money appropriated for the purpose. The penal and reformatory institutions are places of detention for those of our people who have abused the rights and privileges of citizenship; they have violated some law which the executive is charged with the duty of enforcing. And to those in charge of these institutions permit me to say it your duty to see that every law relating to your institution is strictly, faithfully, honestly and impartially enforced, and that in all things you set an example for the inmates thereof worthy of emulation.

The educational institutions are the bulwark of a free government. The difference between a barbarous and an enlightened people is measured largely by the difference in the education and good morals of the two peoples. And likewise the difference between a heathen and a Christian people is largely a difference in education.

This State maintains a University, two preparatory schools, six normal schools and two schools for our colored people, not to say anything of our common schools. Why? Because it wants to give to every boy and girl within its borders the advantages of a liberal education to the end that it may be peopled with a high-class of citizenship. But the thing to which I desire to direct special attention is, that all of these institutions, eleemosynary, penal, reformatory and educational are being maintained for the benefit of the State and those in charge of the same are simply servants, selected from among our million and a quarter of citizenship, to take charge of, manage and conduct them in order that .the greatest possible good may be done. Let it always be kept in mind that these institutions were not established in order to make places for some who may desire work or employment of the character necessary to successfully manage and conduct them; but rather to take care of the helpless, to restrain and train the vicious and lawless, to instruct those who seek physical, mental and moral development.

The economical administration of government simply means the management or conduct thereof without loss or waste. It means frugality in our expenditures; it means prudence and a disposition to save. In my judgment we cannot practice that frugality which we should exercise in public affairs unless and until we are frugal in our personal affairs. Economy, like charity, should begin at home.

I am loyal to the party to which I belong, for reasons which it might not be proper or necessary for me to state at this time. But let it not be forgotten that good business is good politics and the more fearlessly, honestly and efficiently we discharge our duties as the servants of the people, the more zealously we regard our pledges to the people; the less we think of party and the more we think of duty, the more certain we are to retain our supremacy in this State.

A few years ago the slogan of one of the great political parties in this country was "An honest dollar for an honest day's work." Commencing with your Chief Executive and running down the line of officials and public servants to the poorest paid janitor, I pray that our motto for the next four years may be "An honest Day's work for an honest Dollar."

In the past twelve years West Virginia has made rapid progress in forging ahead as one of the great States of the American Union.

The West Virginia that you know today is not the West Virginia of ten or twenty years ago. In my judgment, we have outgrown in many respects the clothes given to us by the Constitution of 1872. And as an evidence of that fact we have found it necessary and expedient at different times to patch the garment and provide extensions. Might it not be well to make a new garment? And would it not be cheaper and better than to be continually patching, adding to and altering the old one? I know it will cost money but if it would be worth the price, we should not hesitate to take this advanced step.

For many years the farmers and owners of modest homes paid much more than their fair share of the taxes necessary to meet the legitimate expenses of our State Government. And this had been going on for so long and those men had become so accustomed to bearing the burden which should have been largely carried by others, that they ceased to complain. But my predecessors in office, Ex-Governor White and Governor Dawson, capable, honest and courageous officials, among our greatest men and best Governors, said this should not continue, that there should be a fairer and better system of taxation; and the result is our new tax laws. No one claims perfection for them, but the enemies, of tax reform admit that the burden is now more equitably distributed than under our old system. We cannot afford to take any backward step in this great reform, and when and where time and experience demonstrates the necessity of amending these laws, I feel confident the legislative department of our government will not hesitate to make the correction.

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Let us not, however, become extremists. We do not desire any one to carry any part of the load which should be borne by others. Remember, also, that capital is timid and sensitive and only seeks investment where it will be fairly treated. I know of no better rule to govern us in this matter than to strive to treat the capital of others just as we would desire it treated if it belonged

to ourselves. The best rule in all matters is the Golden Rule - "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

I have believed for many years that publicity is the best corrective of wrongs known to man. You cannot by legislation make men honest. But there are few men who violate laws or commit crimes against society or mistreat their fellow men, who do not think at the time of the commission, of the offence that the injured party will never know who caused the injury. "We are taught that some men seek darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. If that be true, and it is true, why not turn on all the light possible in public as well as in private affairs?"

In the discharge of my duties as your Chief Executive I shall endeavor at all times to take the people of the State into my confidence and seek light in the execution of the duties laid upon me. And let me advise those in charge of our State institutions to pursue a like policy. We are often suspected of having done a wrong simply because we sought a dark corner in which to perform the act.

It is always improper for one department of our government to invade the province of a coordinate branch thereof; but I cannot refrain from saying that I deeply regret the failure of the legislature to submit to a vote of the people an amendment to our constitution prohibiting the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors in this State; and I am further disappointed in its failure to enact a proper primary election law. On these two matters both parties stand committed, and the fight must go on, will go on until all of our platform pledges have been redeemed and the demands of the people have been satisfied.

I confidently believe and predict that we shall ultimately win on these very important questions, -
"For right is right as God is God,
And right the day must win."

The most important duty of your Chief Executive is not the distribution of patronage, but to see that our laws are faithfully, honestly, fearlessly and impartially executed. In the discharge of that duty I ask, because I shall need, the assistance of all good citizens, and especially do I request the co-operation of all public officials. The Judges of our Courts, our Sheriffs, Prosecuting Attorneys and Justices of the Peace, in many cases, have more to do with the maintenance of the peace, the execution of laws, the protection of the weak and innocent, the punishment of the vicious and lawless and in the making of this in fact a government "of the people, for the people and by the people," than your Governor. With the hearty co-operation of all public officials, the proper enforcement of our laws is practically easy; without it, it is almost impossible: "United we stand, divided we fall."

My predecessors in office have been good and true men. Some of them have sacrificed much in order that the people of this State might have better laws and have them enforced honestly, "fearlessly and impartially. They have all indeed been loyal, patriotic West Virginians, and I shall do well to emulate their example.

And now asking and expecting the support of the people of this State regardless of politics, in all things which work for the betterment of our people and the good of our State; and praying that

He who rules over all may guide and direct our footsteps as we march along the journey of life, I am now ready to take the oath of office.