

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Bob Wise**

**January 15, 2001**

My fellow West Virginians. Sacred to every West Virginian is the concept of home and the homeplace. No matter how far we travel, whether we live far away or right here, West Virginia is always home. And so it is that an inaugural ceremony is a coming home. Coming home to honor our democracy, renew our purpose, celebrate who we are and embrace our future.

Our homecoming brings us together with common values and shared hopes; it invites us today to build a stronger state with more opportunity and more promise for our families and our future.

This truly is a great homecoming. Today we are honored to have participating in this homecoming our congressional delegation - United States Senator Robert C. Byrd, truly one of the legislative giants of our time; United States Senator Jay Rockefeller, so nationally renowned in his efforts for health care abroad and in the United States and in economic development here; and our very able congressional delegation. Representative Alan Mollohan, Representative Shelley Moore Capito and Representative Nick Joe Rahall who tried desperately to get here today but has been fogged in by Washington. That's why I came home. I knew there was too much fog there sometimes.

I am grateful for the help given me in past months by our Legislature, represented here today by state Senate President Earl Ray Tomblin and House Speaker- Bob Kiss. Our Supreme Court of Appeals also is gathered here and our Board of Public Works.

I am humbled that two former governors who have contributed so much to West Virginia's progress are here - Governor Gaston Caperton and Governor Hulett C. Smith. And in our homecoming, we also are joined by others. We are joined by Ohio Congressman Ted Strickland and Pennsylvania Congressman Frank Mascara. And also we have distinguished state sons and daughters who have accomplished much in different walks of life, and they've come home.

I am pleased to have with us today Ralph Baxter, a son from the northern panhandle who has done well on the West Coast and wants to help West Virginia. I am pleased to have Air Force General Charles Holland of Elkins home with us. And I'm pleased to have with us Retired Admiral Joseph Lopez, who grew up in Fayette County. He went in as an enlisted man and rose to one of the highest ranking admirals in the United States Navy and is now doing the same in business in Washington, D.C. All coming home, and many others as well.

And while I am going to talk about where we go from today, we also recognize that many have worked hard to get us to this point. Governor Cecil Underwood has dedicated his life in many capacities - in government, education and business - to serving our people and our state. He led us as the state's youngest governor, then returned 40 years later to lead our state again. Governor, on behalf of the people of West Virginia, thank you for your dedication, your service and your constant commitment.

Today we celebrate not only a transition and inauguration, but also the commemoration of the birth of one of our nation's greatest leaders. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. taught us that

unity, determination and force of will can overcome the mightiest of obstacles, whether it be racial inequality or economic hardship.

Let us seize this moment to honor his legacy by recommitting ourselves to his ideals of justice, progress and opportunity for every person and every family in West Virginia. Because he was a doer. He made things happen.

And there is much that we must do, and we must do now.

For West Virginia, education is the passport to prosperity. And today we commit ourselves to one simple goal crucial for public education and preparing our children for high-paying jobs. Ladies and gentlemen, friends and neighbors, we will become the Education State. We recognize for West Virginia what President John F. Kennedy saw for our country when he stated, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education."

And as we teach our children the 'three Rs/ reading, writing and arithmetic, let us also commit ourselves to teaching two more - responsibility and respect - with character education that teaches right from wrong. We commit today to the PROMISE Scholarship that increases educational opportunity and keeps our young people, our lifeblood, home in West Virginia.

The word 'home' is more than just a place. It also means caring about and caring for each other. West Virginia is home to the children we love, and we will care for them. We will provide quality health care to every child in West Virginia by full implementation of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

West Virginia is home to the parents and grandparents we love, those who have given so much to this state, and we will commit to ensuring for them a system of health care that honors them by fighting for lower prescription drug prices. Already, I have begun negotiating with the pharmaceutical industry to make this happen.

And all of us know that one of the most important things for a strong home requires a good job, and there is much we commit to today.

We commit to fighting to keep and expand the high-paying jobs so important to West Virginia. Working with many West Virginians, I have developed an aggressive economic development plan. Working with the Legislature, we will implement it.

We commit to preserving our traditional base: our coal, our steel, our chemicals, our hardwoods. At the same time, we constantly seek to bring the new economy's jobs.

I commit today to ending the divisive battles. I am absolutely committed to the proposition that good jobs and a good environment can exist in harmony, and the new jobs we seek to create will require a good environment.

We commit today to developing an energy policy that recognizes West Virginia's key role in meeting the nation's energy needs while developing technology to meet additional challenges.

And we commit today to bringing the benefits of technology to every business, job, school and home. Thanks to Senator Byrd and the congressional delegation, every West Virginian can easily drive the interstate. Now, every West Virginian must be equally connected to the Internet.

Now I know there are those who say this cannot be done. They say we have to meet too many challenges, that we have too much to overcome. They say our state is too poor to invest in such a cause and too poorly prepared for the changing economy. And certainly there are challenges. Our already slow economy is at further risk from a declining national growth. Our people already are highly taxed. Our budget is in danger of shortfall. And our young people, our very soul, are leaving the state in search of better opportunities.

Yes, the challenges are great and the challenges are clear. But we cannot let obstacles become excuses for inaction. Because, in fact, our difficulties are precisely why we must act.

To those who say we can't do it, or to those who ask 'how,' I say look no further than the Bible in the Book of Nehemiah. Once mighty and prosperous Jerusalem had fallen; its residents scattered or carried off into bondage. Determined to rebuild his beloved home, Nehemiah went to the conquering king with three requests: permission to return home, safe passage to Jerusalem and the resources necessary to rebuild the city. Nehemiah's commitment won the king's consent, and he returned to his homeland where the people joined together to accomplish his dream.

Against all odds, they raised the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days, and, as the Bible tells us in Nehemiah 2:18, "Then let us start building. So they committed themselves to the common good." And just as the residents of Jerusalem committed themselves, so must we.

It will take us much more than 52 days, and, like Nehemiah, it will take the strong hand of our leaders, our people and our faith. But we can raise West Virginia to the heights it must attain.

For remember, despite our vast challenges, we also have vast resources. Our geographical location is central to much of our nation's industrial and population heartland. We have made great strides in education; our infrastructure and four-lane highways bring great opportunities.

And go into any part of West Virginia, our cities, our hills, our hollows, to find our single, greatest asset: it's us, it's our people, proud and independent, hardworking, born in faith, raised in traditional values and blessed with determination. When we unleash this spirit and believe in ourselves and our future, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

Our road will not always be easy, and it won't be done overnight. And while we seek to accomplish much, we also will make mistakes. And I will ask your understanding for that. But you know as well as I that that is how progress is made. But if we commit ourselves to investing in our people and our infrastructure, there is no limit to what West Virginia can do because each of us has a Nehemiah; a builder, inside of us. To realize that greatest potential, and so that future generations look back on this as one of the turning points for our state, we must take and make certain pledges: I pledge to put progress ahead of partisanship.

I pledge to seek cooperation over confrontation. I value the assistance already provided me by the Legislature, and I look forward to working closely to developing mutual agendas with cooperation.

I pledge to put practical ideas ahead of ideology.

And we all pledge to put the next generation ahead of the next general election. So with confidence and commitment, let us work together to start building the West Virginia we hope to be the home for our children and our grandchildren.

I assume this responsibility deeply humbled by the trust you have given me. I recognize, as Senator Robert C. Byrd recently stated in an address to newly elected members of the Senate, and this actually could be an oath of office, and I quote: "The duty beyond our official duties may be the hardest duty of all. It is to lead by example, to endeavor to inspire others and to demonstrate through action, speech and personal example that our country and its people always come first, and that those things matter to you more than personal popularity or acclaim." Senator Byrd, thank you for those words.

My friends, I take this oath today with faith in God, our people and our way of life. I pledge not only to do my best, but to bring out the best our state has to offer. And I pledge to work as hard as I know how for the working men and women of West Virginia, our parents, our children and our shared future.

And so let us go forth and begin to build that foundation for our progress and prosperity, always looking ahead, moving forward and embracing our shared future.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the state of West Virginia.