

Inaugural Address of Governor Gaston Caperton

January 16, 1989

Gov. Moore, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, honorable justices of the Supreme Court, distinguished members of the congressional delegation, members of the Board of Public Works, reverend clergy, distinguished guests, my fellow West Virginians:

One-and-a-half years ago, a few of us dreamed that I would be standing here as your governor. Many said that this was an impossible dream.

But here I am, thanks to you.

Today we dream about what West Virginia will be in the next four years. And again we will find those that feel that this is an impossible dream.

But watch out, because here we come.

Now I don't suffer under any illusions, I know how tough it was to become your governor, and I know how tough it's going to be to make West Virginia turn around.

As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address, "Only foolish optimists can deny the dark realities of the moment."

In that same address he wisely said, "It is time for the truth, the whole truth."

Our situation in West Virginia compels us to speak today with that same amount of truth and honesty. Although there are many bright spots in our state, there are many people who are suffering as did those in the Depression.

The truth is, West Virginia does have serious problems and it is time to attack those problems. It is time to go to battle - our enemy is misdirected self-interest, apathy, defeatism and low expectations. This enemy has crippled our state and paralyzed our pioneer spirit.

Our education system has not kept pace, our economy has not created the needed jobs, and our environment has not been protected, and our government has not functioned responsibly.

However, it is not my purpose today to mourn West Virginia.

On the contrary, it is my purpose to call us to action. Our allies in this battle are courage, commitment, compassion, confidence, competitiveness and cooperation.

Our plan is both simple and enormous in its simplicity: to be the best West Virginia we can be; to no longer let our problems overshadow our potential.

How do we accomplish this mission?

By effecting a great partnership of West Virginians, an army that recognizes its interdependence and acknowledges the necessity to work together for the common good. Our mission will be accomplished as we focus with tenacity on a new set of values.

Values like ethics. West Virginians are an honest and straightforward people and they deserve the same from their public officials. We need to be able to trust each other, and that trust can only be achieved with the firm commitment toward ethical standards in government.

And we must value ethics. We have to understand that excellence does not always mean being the best, but it does mean doing our best.

That calls for dedication and hard work.

We must value enthusiasm. The challenge before us requires not only our commitment but our energy. Our future depends upon a tireless effort.

We must value empathy and equality. Only by putting ourselves in each other's shoes can we truly realize the essence of a partnership devoted to common welfare.

We must value enterprise and the forces that drive it. Jobs develop and grow where businesses are born and nurtured. Likewise, we must value employment. Our efforts at economic expansion to create new jobs must be coupled with concern for the protection of the worker - safe working conditions and fair wages.

We must value our environment for we have been blessed with a state unrivaled in natural beauty. That priceless heritage must be preserved and maintained. The necessary development of our abundant natural resources need not destroy the unique beauty of our surroundings. A collective commitment to cleaning up our state is imperative.

And last but by far not the least, we must value education. Quality education is not only a noble goal, it is an absolute necessity for us to compete in an increasingly complex world. A commitment to education is an investment, an investment in our children in our families and in our state.

As the governor of this state, I have a mandate to provide the leadership, the direction, and the discipline necessary to establish and promote these values and to accomplish this mission.

Putting West Virginia on the road to recovery will take unprecedented efforts of all of us; but it will be worth it.

It will mean making tough and unpopular decisions; but it will be worth it.

It will mean facing the truth even when the truth hurts; but it will be worth it.

What was good enough for West Virginia in the past is not good enough for West Virginia today. West Virginia can stand no more "business as usual." These times demand change.

For things to get better, we've got to get better - all of us, all of us, all of us.

Along with the rest of the world, West Virginia is staring squarely into the 21st century, a century in which progress and change will come so rapidly that only those who are prepared will survive and prosper.

How do we adequately prepare West Virginia for that future? With the leadership of our partnership councils, on both a regional and statewide basis, we will follow a four- point strategy, it's a simple strategy:

First, we will identify our strengths.

Second, we will set priorities.

Third, we will mobilize our limited public and private resources in a strategic manner.

And fourth, we will exercise with uncompromising energy and commitment.

Whether it is software, tourism, mining, manufacturing, or some innovative idea from the mind of an innovative entrepreneur, we will develop business and we will create jobs.

It is through partnership that we will find progress.

It is through progress that we will know prosperity.

I believe that these difficult times give us a unique opportunity because crisis calls upon us for action, and it is undelayed action that we so desperately need.

Therefore, today I am calling the Legislature into special session at noon, Wednesday, Jan. 25, 1989. My stated purpose for that special session will be threefold. First, we will propose and ask the Legislature to adopt comprehensive ethics legislation. With such a need for change, the people of this state deserve to know that their public officials are acting in the best interest of their state.

Second, I will propose and ask the Legislature to adopt a plan to consolidate and reorganize the various agencies of government promoting better management, cost savings and better delivery of governmental services.

Third, the financial difficulties facing the state demand immediate action. I will propose measures to deal with the short-term need to pay our bills and the long-term need to add stability to our finances.

There are those who will say that we cannot afford the cost of a special session, but with such a need for ethical, efficient and solvent government, we must act now. The people of our state and these times cry for undelayed action.

Crisis demands the best from each of us and tolerates nothing less.

This government and this Legislature will accomplish much because we will stop fighting against each other and start fighting for West Virginia.

This Legislature and this governor will be successful because we will put aside special interests and self-interest for the best interests of West Virginia.

I believe in the essential goodness of man, and in the fundamental positive meaning of life. With God's help, I know that together we can build West Virginia to be the best West Virginia it can

be. It is in that spirit that I ask you for your support, your cooperation, your active participation and your prayers.

My vision of West Virginia is one where these mountains are alive with better schools, challenging jobs, responsive and efficient government, and a protective environment. My vision is a state where these mountains are alive with positive, progressive and resourceful people who will come together with a clear vision and shared values.

Let our Partnership for Progress become a banner of pride for all West Virginians, a symbol of a new vision. Let it signify a fundamental change in our outlook - one that lifts us up and moves us into a new era of prosperity.

For, as Carnegie said, "If the mind can conceive it, and the heart can believe it, we can achieve it!"