

Inaugural Address of Governor William W. Barron

January 16, 1961

GOVERNOR UNDERWOOD, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is with somewhat mixed emotions that I accept the challenge of this high office.

I am pleased, of course, as any resident of our state would be, that my fellow West Virginians have found it in their hearts to grant me their trust, their confidence and their faith. The great honor you have bestowed upon me is formally acknowledged this day in reverence and with a sense of deep appreciation.

My wife, Opal, who has been a constant source of inspiration, and the other members of my family share with me this feeling of gratitude and esteem. For us, it is a day of gladness.

At the same time, I realize quite fully that the duties I have assumed here carry with them grave and awesome responsibilities. May God allow me the power, the courage and the understanding to meet them squarely and effectively.

The position of Governor is a demanding one requiring conscientious and continual effort on the part of the chief executive himself; but to succeed, he must also have the whole-hearted and prayerful cooperation of the entire citizenry.

No one person can provide the solutions to our difficulties. Therefore, in order to make the most of this opportunity to build a better West Virginia, I shall enlist the aid of all our people, who must be honestly concerned with and interested in the many problems we face. My administration will, throughout its term of office, strive to obtain the wise advice and counsel of leaders in every field of public endeavor.

There have been few eras in the history of our state when a chief executive was confronted with more disturbing conditions than those encountered as this Democratic government launches its performance of duties. The vexing questions awaiting answers are many and varied, and the need for positive action to unravel these punitive puzzles is urgent and of critical importance.

It is imperative for us to begin immediately a concerted and unceasing attack to repel the things that are wrong with our state. We have charted a clear course with the aim to make certain that no family within our borders is forced to live beneath the level of our traditional concept of the dignity of man.

It is essential that we display determination to band steadfastly behind the things that are right about West Virginia.

The situation requires that we re-dedicate ourselves to principles apparently all but forsaken in the every-day tumult of our troublesome times. We must devote ourselves to unselfish service and exert unremitting energy to the purpose of regaining misplaced ideals.

West Virginia today is in uneasy circumstances as the result of a large number of problems, brought on by an equally large number of reasons. There is nothing to be gained by further trying

to place the blame. There is no time left for petty quarrelling. It is vitally necessary for us to forget political differences, consult with each other and work with all the ingenuity and wisdom at our command to bring into being, as quickly as possible, a practical and productive program for the common good.

In seriousness and need for urgency in steps toward solution, none of our difficulties approaches unemployment. This is our predominant, over-riding problem. It summons the attention of our best brains and requires that we muster maximum strength to overcome the strife. Almost unbelievable hardships to innocent people of our state have brought agony and grief.

I know that the more fortunate citizens of West Virginia regard this trouble as I do - with heartache and compassion. I am certain there will be willing cooperation and assistance on the part of everyone as we close ranks to counteract the distress, dispel doubt and despair and overcome anxieties.

There must be a spiritual re-awakening in West Virginia. Never before in the history of our state has there been a greater opportunity to demonstrate the truth of Christian principles.

All of our citizens have heard a great deal about the misery being experienced in some parts of West Virginia, but how many of you have actually seen these misfortunes?

We hope to organize a caravan of members of the Legislature, leaders of labor, industry, business, education and civic groups, together with our ministers and other church workers, to visit hard-hit areas and take a first-hand look at the suffering.

I think you would be amazed at what you would see. I have seen it - in town after town, in county after county, in many sections of our state.

Are we going to help these people or not? The time has come when we must make up our minds whether we are to serve as true Christians or continue to masquerade.

As for me and the part I shall shoulder in seeking solutions to these awful problems, I say we will help them.

I ask the people of West Virginia to join now with the leadership of the state's new administration to pledge whatever sacrifice is necessary to assure equal opportunity and dignity for all West Virginians. We must carry out to the fullest our theme of "New Hope."

Where there is darkness, let us shed light. Let us, in truth, be our brother's keeper. We no longer should be - indeed, we cannot be - indifferent to the needs of others.

Coal remains the hub of our wheel. No other industry affects the economic picture of West Virginia as much as does the production of the mines.

There has been a swift and steady decline in the number of men working in coal. In the past ten years, employment in mines of the state has dropped from 112,000 to 50,000. Automation has taken a heavy toll in jobs. Mechanization sometimes permits one machine to replace as many as 50 employees. The net result has been the migration of thousands of West Virginians to other

states where employment opportunities are better. The 1960 census shows that our population loss has been close to eight per cent.

Unemployment, although extremely perilous among miners, is by no means limited to the coal industry. Many other segments of our economy have been hard hit and forced to reduce working crews. Some plants have also found it necessary to curtail employment schedules of those still on the payrolls.

The healing of our economic wounds is only one of the major problems the new administration will be called upon to face.

The Democratic Party is obligated to carry out the mandate of the people with sound and improved programs in all phases of state services. We are keenly aware of this fact and shall, as a governmental team, strive to attain heights unmatched in West Virginia's almost one hundred years of statehood.

We have already created a favorable industrial and business climate by bringing together many of our outstanding people to assist in planning. Labor, industry, education, the leadership of the Legislature and representatives of other groups have met with us during the past several weeks in our Non-Partisan Citizens' Conference.

This marked the first time such an approach had been made to gain approval of a state program before the Legislature convened. It was a historic step - a bold step at a time when boldness was necessary. From these unique meetings, much good should result.

There is a need for improvements in state institutions, roads, education, conservation and a host of other fields of service to our people. These will be provided as speedily as feasible.

We will launch a statewide clean-up campaign designed to beautify roadsides, parks and streams. An important part of my program will be to transform our state into the nation's cleanest in time for our Centennial celebration in 1963.

One of my first official acts as Governor will be to submit to the Legislature a widespread plan for economic development. It will include the creation of a Department of Commerce, which would absorb some other agencies and put an end to an over-lapping of functions.

The Legislature will also be asked to consider a sizable number of bills outlining other needed improvements. Details of these proposed measures will be revealed when I address the Senate and House in joint assembly.

We will proceed at once to seek the tools that are necessary to do the job required. We will do so with the expectation that the moves we make in these early days of the administration will become stepping stones. Our program has been mapped with the intention of solving the immediate needs of our people and with the long-range aspects of the state's well-being kept prominently in mind.

We have planned carefully. It is our belief that the procedure shaped for an all-out attack on the problems of West Virginia will bring progress and prosperity, restore our state to its rightful position and open wide to our people the door of happiness.

We will be aided in every way possible by our national administration. President-Elect Kennedy has already begun plans to honor the campaign commitments he made to our citizens.

With Charleston and Washington teamed together, and with the solid support of our county and municipal governments, we have unity of purpose.

There is a sincere desire on the part of all for a re-kindling of the pioneer spirit with which our great nation and state were built. There is profound faith in our philosophy. There is moral strength. There is vision.

Each of our trials and tribulations is sent to teach us something. We will profit by lessons of the past.

My co-workers and I are possessed with boundless confidence that our goals will be reached or surpassed. We feel certain this outlook is also that of our people as a whole. Our state stands ready to realize its tremendous potential.

As your Governor, I seek not personal power or prestige. I ask only that I be permitted to play my proper part in the building of a better West Virginia.

It is my fervent prayer that I may wear the cloak of humility and have the guidance of the Almighty as I serve my people, my state and my country.

I assume my solemn duties with the pledge that I will give my all.

In the handclasp of mutual trust and toil, we shall advance to a brighter and more abundant future, not only for ourselves and our children, but for generations yet unborn.