

Inaugural Address of Governor Cecil H Underwood

January 13, 1997

Thank you for braving the elements to be here today. Now you know how I felt when I undertook the campaign. I braved the elements to run for Governor because the issues were important to me and important to West Virginia. In the same spirit, I view this inaugural, all of the events of these two days, as a celebration of what the people of West Virginia have done, of how far we have come to turn the state around. Little more than one thousand days separate us from the 21st century. While responding to the impulsive demands of day-to-day problems, we are specially challenged to look into the future. We must see and understand West Virginia as it is today and must have a vision of what it can be in the new times of the new century. Much of our state's 20th century politics was built on conflict and division--labor vs. management, urban vs. rural, north vs. south, east vs. west. The politics of our future must be built on consensus and inclusion--one people, one state working together for mutual progress. In a very real sense, we will go into the 21st century together or we will get lost along the way.

I am honored to become the 32nd Governor of West Virginia and humbled because it is the will of the people. I am eager to serve this wonderful place we call home. Forty years ago, I became the 25th governor in vastly different times. When I complete this term in 2001, our lives will be dramatically different as the Industrial Age gives way to the Information Age.

As the transition from one administration to another is completed, we must begin to think of transition as a permanent condition. In this way, not only will we participate in the future, we will help define it.

I appreciate the cooperation already extended to me by Governor Caperton, his administration, the Legislature and other elected officials. Governor Caperton and the Legislature have had the courage to make some wise but difficult decisions to improve the economic climate of West Virginia. The private sector has exercised unprecedented leadership to improve the business environment. We are in a progressive mood to do what needs to be done.

The mission of my administration will be to grow the West Virginia economy and to enhance the quality of life for every West Virginian.

Educational reform has become an annual passion in West Virginia. I expect to merge recent reforms into a functional system. Technology can improve current delivery of education. Distance learning networks can reach students in the most isolated areas of the state. Professional compensation must be competitive with other states, and continuing professional development must keep pace with changes in delivery. Private sector partnerships will guarantee continued growth and offer new opportunities for our graduates.

Modern health care has become a challenge national in scope and costly in delivery. The challenge becomes even greater in a state as rural as West Virginia. I expect to work with health care providers to build networks to link the medical schools and major medical centers with rural hospitals, community clinics and home health care services to reach the people of rural West Virginia. The system needs to focus on prevention and improved life styles as well as treatment.

Current trends in the life sciences, in information technology and in disease management all create a new era in which quality can be improved and costs controlled.

I want the governor's office structure to balance deliberation and action. I will continue to be a strategic thinker, hopefully ahead of my time. I will use whatever gifts of natural intelligence I have and my experience in West Virginia to make the best judgements possible. I will communicate my vision and my decisions to the people so they will understand my actions and come to see transition as commonplace.

I will make technology our friend, deploy it to improve the service of government and expand it into the private sectors. Wherever used, the goal is to improve production and service while reducing the cost of both.

I will hold myself and those who work with me accountable for outstanding performance during this administration. My actions will demonstrate my beliefs.

I believe in West Virginia, for I know it has a great future. I am committed to West Virginia and to our future.

Memories of this colorful ceremony, the hard work and contributions of thousands of people and the support from all political parties will inspire me to work hard every day of the next four years.

With all humility I undertake the responsibilities of Governor. I shall trust in Almighty God for strength and guidance. I will give to the people of West Virginia the best that I have. With their help and support, West Virginia will be ready to take its place in the 21st century.