

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Clarence Watson Meadows**

**January 15, 1945**

Governor Neely and Fellow West Virginians:

A democracy thrives best when mutual confidence and understanding exists between the people and their elected representatives and officers. To promote and preserve such during my administration, it is a privilege and duty to place myself and my Party squarely on record with the people of this State. In so doing, I seek the cooperation, advice and help of all public-spirited citizens who are interested in the welfare of West Virginia.

Those who govern do so with the consent of the governed. Hence, we who are entering upon the execution of the trust the people have placed in us, are not unmindful of the responsibilities which we are about to assume, or of the importance of conducting the affairs of State with that high degree of integrity and fidelity so necessary for good government.

In the midst of war, we take pride in the fact that West Virginia has assumed her rightful place alongside her sister States. Not only are we furnishing to our Country thousands of heroic men and women, but in addition thereto, untold quantities of raw and manufactured materials for the prosecution of this world-wide conflict. War necessarily gives rise to problems of government. The peace to follow will bring more and perhaps graver problems. These must all be met. They must be solved. One certain assurance of solution is the preservation in government of honesty, efficiency, soundness and a will to serve all the people.

I do not contemplate basic changes in our governmental structure. Some few refinements or revisions may appear to be wise. I firmly believe that our problems during the coming four years will be confined to those of administration and finance. Wherever governmental functions and services can be improved, improvement should be made. However, none can deny the wisdom of seeking improvement by the method of serious study and sound procedure rather than by haphazard or hasty legislation.

It was my privilege to serve you as Attorney General for almost five and one-half years. That experience gave to me certain definite ideas and conceptions of good government. Nevertheless, I shall ever be responsive to all constructive criticism and suggestions relating to any changes or innovations designed to improve the service of the State to its people.

## **STATE FINANCES**

Every citizen is proud of the financial stability of our State. Such can be matched by only a few and exceeded by none of the States of the Union. Since 1933, West Virginia has steadily climbed to its present high position of sound fiscal policy and management. This must be maintained.

Taxation is necessary in any government, but a just and equal assessment and distribution of the tax burden is an essential part thereof. Our tax structure appears to be sound, particularly in light of our constitutional provisions surrounding such. Perhaps minor refinements or adjustments, in the light of coming events, may appear to be necessary. However, with the present strong

financial position of our State, and in view of the unprecedented need for taxes of a Federal nature, it is my belief that new revenues are unwarranted for State purposes.

We now have a balanced budget. Such must be continued. Expenditures for current purposes must be kept within current income. It is true that the State has built up an appreciable surplus during the last two years. While war prosperity with increased payrolls and resultant spending has, to some extent, brought increased revenues, these have been somewhat offset by decreased revenues in other quarters. Undoubtedly, a major factor in producing this surplus has been the inability of the State to expend moneys for capital improvements, such as new or improved buildings and road construction. This war will end soon, we hope. The problems of readjustment, rehabilitation and unemployment will then be ours. To what better use can this surplus be put than to the solution of these problems? I, therefore, believe that our surplus moneys should not be diverted for current purposes, but should be devoted principally to capital expenditures now badly needed throughout the State.

In the spending of public moneys, efficiency and economy must be basic considerations. The power to take by taxation, does not give public officials the power to spend indiscriminately or unwisely. When my administration shall have ended, if but only one word of praise can be said of it, I hope that such may be that the taxpayers' dollar was spent wisely, efficiently, honestly and economically.

## **LABOR AND CAPITAL**

We owe a debt of gratitude to the thousands of men and women who earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brow in our mines, mills, factories and industrial plants. Their contribution to victory is an outstanding achievement in the history of West Virginia. Likewise, to the employers, we are similarly indebted. These groups, so vitally interested in prosecuting a war, have, with minor exceptions, lived and worked in peace and harmony, with mutual respect for and understanding of the rights of the other. Time was in West Virginia when such was not the case. But all fair minded people recognize the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively, and respect the mutual rights and obligations of both employer and employee in this connection. West Virginia is largely an industrial State. Our prosperity depends greatly upon the continuation of full employment at fair wages under good working conditions.

Four great State departments vitally affect our industries and their workers. They should be conducted so as to give every protection to all laborers consistent with every proper consideration to those who employ labor, and further gauged by the financial ability of the State to support such. services.

Our Labor Department should be one of vitality and service to all, both employer, as well as employee. Its functions have been expanded in recent years. Further expansion may be wise.

Our Unemployment Compensation Department is highly important to both labor and capital. Its provisions and benefits to be derived thereunder may be in need of broadening and some liberalization. Such will be brought to the attention of the Legislature.

Our Workmen's Compensation Department is all important. It, too, may demand some revision and liberalization. Such also will be submitted to the Legislature.

Our Department of Mines is of vital importance to a large segment of our population. Upon the efficient administration of such rests the life and limb of thousands of those who toil underground. Safety must never be sacrificed for the sake of an extra ton of coal.

## **SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION**

The welfare of our State and its future citizens is today more than ever dependent upon the type of education supported by public authority. We have progressed steadily in the education of our youth. That progression must not be halted. We must keep step with the world.

Adequate buildings and educational facilities; faithful, qualified and sufficiently paid teachers are essential to any real educational program. A full nine-month term of school, free textbooks, teachers' retirement, a broadened and enlarged school program, vocational training, are all established parts of our school system, and must be continued or improved if need be.

Our State supported institutions of higher learning must continue to give every West Virginia boy and girl ready opportunity to procure the best in higher education. Such institutions, in the matter of administration and scholastics, should rest upon a high and unassailable plane comparable to institutions of like character in our sister States.

These stated educational objectives and others not mentioned, however, are subject to the requirements of efficiency, economy and operation within available revenues, no less than any other governmental service. Our schools are dependent in part upon local income, as well as upon State revenue. Can there be a greater incentive to the sound economic administration of school affairs than the assumption by the counties of proper local responsibility in financing our school program? Full assumption by the counties of their reasonable responsibility in the matter of school finance would, to a marked degree, solve some of the financial problems of our schools. When local officials cease to look to proper local sources for at least some of their revenue on which to operate, they then quite naturally may cease to feel local responsibility in the matter of public service.

## **ROADS**

The people rightfully demand good roads. Such are an indispensable part of our business, economic and social life. Upon their maintenance and constant improvement, rests the future development of our State to a marked degree. Postwar plans for road building will doubtless mean much to West Virginia. Adequate and modern through State highways are essential, but such become, to a great measure, useless, unless connected and fed by an adequate system of secondary and all-weather farm-to-market roads.

Wartime restrictions have curtailed our road building program perceptibly. Nevertheless, plans for the State should call for great advances along this line, when coupled with the allocation of a proper part of the State surplus for the purpose of greatly improving our secondary road system.

Additional road revenues would appear to be unnecessary under existing conditions, together with the definite probabilities of increased Federal aid.

### **STATE INSTITUTIONS**

The services in our humane, eleemosynary and penal institutions have been greatly curtailed. The war has taken its toll in loss of help, difficulty of procuring food, stringent restrictions upon building, and the inability to get proper equipment. This must be remedied as quickly and efficiently as possible.

A considerable portion of our State surplus should be devoted to the upbuilding of these institutions.

I have stated, and I again state, that the administration of institutions of this nature must always be placed in the hands of competent, able men and women, and that in their selection, I shall not play politics with human misery.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRY**

West Virginia, with its wealth of natural resources, should beckon to the industries of our Nation, as a fertile field for industrial development. Phenomenal advancements in the field of science and chemistry indicate that our coal, oil, gas, silica sands and timber are the basic natural resources for thousands of useful products. Establishment within our borders of industries designed to make full use of these raw materials will result not only in immediate increased prosperity to our State and its people, but will form a background for stable employment and economic independence.

These advantages should be proclaimed and made known. Industry can be attracted to our State if we but seek to attract it. Our water power, our transportation facilities, our adequate and high type of native labor contribute to the fact that West Virginia holds unlimited possibilities for greater industrial development.

State government can take a part in this program. Through cooperation with labor and capital, industrial and business organizations, chambers of commerce, various civic bodies, State facilities can well be provided whereby, through advertising mediums, the assimilation of data and information, those interested in supplying the wants of tomorrow will be attracted to our State.

### **CONSERVATION**

No greater or more beautiful scenic advantages, coupled with the sports of hunting and fishing, are potentially possible than in West Virginia. Our heritage of forests, streams and wild life, climate and outdoor recreational facilities are great and invaluable resources. Opportunity for their protection and development is unlimited. A sound and scientifically planned conservation program in charge of practical, experienced personnel, encompassing proper protection for all our natural resources, the elimination of pollution from our beautiful streams, and the wholly adequate stocking of these streams with fish and our forests and fields with game, is a decided governmental obligation.

Our Conservation personnel must be of the best. A degree of civil service therein would appear to be desirable and conducive to greater efficiency, as well as economy.

## **AGRICULTURE**

Better roads and the extension of public utility service can make rural life not only more attractive, but immeasurably more profitable. I am deeply interested in the welfare of the farmer. The success and prosperity of the farming industry is vital to our continued progress, peace and welfare. The science of agriculture should be given greater aid, and adequate financial assistance should be rendered to all State departments, schools and agencies designed to benefit our citizens who till the soil.

Reforestation, the prevention of soil erosion and the improvement of the fertility of our land are matters of much importance. Adequate market prices and market facilities are necessities to the farmer and the consuming public.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY**

Our State has recognized and must continue to recognize its full responsibility in the matter of social security. The underprivileged, the needy, the aged, are as much a part of our citizenry as those who have fared better at the hands of fate. West Virginia must keep step with the times, and as advancements are made along this line by the Federal government, we must integrate and coordinate our program therewith. The full extension of the social security program, commensurate with the ability of the State and in keeping with a sound tax structure, is a necessity for good government.

## **VETERANS**

No one disagrees that to no other group of our citizens will we owe so much as to the returned veterans. The most we can do for them will be too little in repayment for their sacrifices.

The Federal government, by legislation enacted and proposed, will to a marked degree protect the welfare of these citizens. Nevertheless, our State is not without responsibility. Our services should be integrated as much as possible with the Federal program. Much can be done in aiding and assisting the veteran to take advantage of Federal benefits. Surely the field of our State services in the administration of veterans' affairs must be broadened, and made wholly efficient in every respect.

Job preference, educational advantages, preferential hospital treatment and aid in adjusting economic affairs should be a part of this program.

Needless to say, a comprehensive postwar program of public building and road construction will furnish much needed employment for the returned veteran.

## **INTERIM COMMITTEES**

While not suggesting inadequacy, inefficiency, or a need for improvement in the sense that some person or some administration has been responsible therefor, but viewing the problem as a development of the incredibly fast moving years with their attendant phenomenal advancements,

as well as their many difficulties, I suggest the advisability of the creation of the following legislative interim committees for the purpose of making thorough studies of certain phases of our governmental service and economic life, and to report their findings and recommendations to the next regular session of the Legislature for such action as appears to be proper.

*First:* It is apparent that the welfare of our State depends in no small degree upon the health of our citizens. Sanitation and sanitation facilities, medical care, hospitalization, clinics, public health services, are all matters of deep concern and affect every man, woman and child. Such a study must be comprehensive, and should be made by recognized medical authorities, together with outstanding private citizens. No people can be prosperous and happy without attendant good health.

*Second:* I advocate a thorough study of our system of maintaining, supporting and administering the affairs of our eleemosynary and penal institutions. Overlapping facilities, inadequate programs, inefficient or insufficient administration or medical care, should be ferreted out and remedied if such exists. The State must be assured that it is receiving proper value for every dollar expended for these purposes, and the citizens and inmates are entitled to receive such. The tubercular, the insane, the afflicted and the criminal must not be made a greater problem than they already are.

*Third:* While our public school system and our institutions of higher learning have advanced greatly within the last few years, I believe a study of our educational system will be highly profitable, both to the State and its citizens. State aid for schools, local responsibility, adequate, well paid and well trained teachers, ample buildings and educational facilities, while most essential, can never be of greatest advantage unless our school system functions with the highest degree of efficiency and economy.

Our institutions of higher learning are many, whether too many or too few could best be decided by impartial study. Again the problem of receiving full benefit for the expenditure of the tax dollar is at once apparent. Overlapping facilities may exist. Outmoded courses of study should not be continued. New courses in keeping with the times should be established.

I cannot ignore the fact that there exists the conviction in the minds of many whose judgment I respect, that our school system, both public and in the higher institutions, can be immeasurably improved through an impartial and exhaustive study of the problems connected therewith. I, of course, cannot on this occasion discuss all the problems or services of the State, and I have referred to only some of those of a major nature. However, we should not be unmindful of our obligation with respect to such matters as (1) civil liberties and equal rights; (2) an efficient and highly respected department of public safety; (3) the women of West Virginia who have demonstrated their unparalleled ability to fill the places of their menfolk in the normal pursuits upon the home front. Their rights and their proper protection in all lines of private and public enterprise should be fully recognized; (4) efficient and realistic control and supervision of the sale of intoxicating liquors and beer.

Other problems of importance will, of course, arise and must be given every proper consideration, with the best interests of the State and its citizens held firmly in mind.

## **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, with deep humility and a sense of the grave responsibility attending my taking the oath of office today, I turn to the performance of those duties which shall be mine during the next four years. I shall proceed hopefully, for I believe all our problems have a solution; that our program is sound. Such will certainly involve no fear, no favor, no lack of devotion to duty on my part. However, without the ever present guidance of the Supreme Being and the wholehearted support of all the people, I cannot even hope to succeed. But, with God-given wisdom, strength and courage to serve well and with the loyal cooperation of every citizen, I cannot - I will not fail.