

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Earl Ray Tomblin**

**January 14, 2013**

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us for this celebration. We celebrate as united West Virginians today, not as political parties divided, but as one, with common dreams and purposes. I'm honored you have given me the tremendous opportunity to serve as your Governor for another four years.

I want to extend my appreciation to Senator Jay Rockefeller who has committed his life to serving this great state. As a VISTA volunteer in a small mining community nearly 50 years ago, Sen. Jay Rockefeller transformed his commitment to one community into a life of service for the people of West Virginia. There are few people in this world like him, and it's been a privilege to have worked with him throughout the years. Sen. Rockefeller championed many efforts for our families, miners, military members and veterans as well as laying the ground work for some of our state's most valuable growing business relationships. I'm forever grateful for Sen. Rockefeller's lifelong passion to help others and all he has done for West Virginians: he is truly a man of great character. Senator, I thank you.

And to Senator Joe Manchin, who couldn't be with us today: but who is always working to ensure our voices are heard in our nation's capital.

Congressman Rahall, Congresswoman Capito, as well as Congressman McKinley, who couldn't be here today: thank you for your commitment to the highest honor one can receive to represent the great people of our state in all 55 counties.

Governor Caperton and Governor Wise: thank you both for your past service to our state and for your continued dedication to West Virginia.

To my colleagues on the Board of Public Works: congratulations. I look forward to working with you.

And to the members of the House and Senate: I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to continue our work together to move our state forward.

To my many supporters, who have poured their hearts into getting me elected and then re-elected: thank you.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank a few other very important people.

To one of the most supportive and loving families I could have ever asked for. Mom, Dad and Carl, thank you for standing by my side: and cheering for many, many years. And to my two biggest fans, my lovely wife Joanne and our son Brent, thank you for your unconditional love and support. I love both of you very much.

I have grown up and raised my family here, and there is no place I'd rather be than right here, in this the Great State of West Virginia.

Over the years, I've witnessed firsthand the generosity of West Virginians. And in this past year our families, friends and communities have shown me again the strength of their character in the wake of the spring tornado and floods, the derecho, Hurricane Sandy, and the tragic loss of two State Troopers. In the midst of these extraordinarily difficult times, West Virginians joined together to support each other. They found strength in the company of others and they put the needs of our neighbors and communities first.

Last month, the tragic events at Sandy Hook Elementary School reminded us all of how precious our families, friends and communities are and the joy they bring into our lives. Such loss is heartbreaking it's unspeakable. Still today, Joanne and I continue to pray for the families and friends of the children and adults who left this world far too soon. I ask everyone here with us today and throughout the Mountain State to take a moment of silence to reflect upon those we have lost and those who mean so much to us in our own lives. Thank you.

Two weeks ago many of us gathered together with friends and family to celebrate the holiday season and the New Year. It was an opportunity, not only to catch up, but to be reminded of our blessings.

Throughout my years in public service as Senate President and as Governor, I've never forgotten the tremendous value it is for a person, a state, or a country to look back to see how far they have come so they may build upon what has been accomplished or to chart a new course of action.

During my years in public service, I've worked hard to create a brighter future for West Virginia, and I've approached every decision, every challenge, and every opportunity with one goal and that is putting West Virginia First.

Our journey to transform this State began over 25 years ago. The road we have traveled has not always been easy. But we have done it the right way working together with business, labor, Republican, and Democrat to solve our problems.

We fixed our ailing pension systems. And now we have a plan for paying our hardworking teachers and public employees the pensions they deserve. We've invested almost \$2 billion to make sure their pensions will be there when they retire.

At one time we had doctors refusing to care for our state employees because their government insurance program let them down. But by creating the PEIA finance board and through our sound fiscal management, we have solved that problem.

We pay our bills on time, and we are now on a path to resolve our last unfunded liability: Other Post-Employment Benefits or OPEB. In fact, we've cut this liability in half.

We are less than four years away from paying off our old workers compensation debt. We had a broken system with widespread fraud, poor care for workers, and premiums that were way too high. We stabilized, and then privatized our workers compensation system. The albatross around our economic neck is all but gone, and we now have one of the best programs in the country.

When our doctors couldn't get malpractice insurance, we took the initiative, reformed our legal culture and created a physicians mutual giving our providers accessible and affordable insurance. Today, doctors are thriving in West Virginia.

We have made significant strides in building schools and expanding access for clean water and sewer systems for our citizens. Since 1989, we have spent over \$1.7 billion to construct 132 new schools. In just the past two years, we've dedicated a total of more than \$165 million to school improvements and construction projects taking place in all 55 counties. And working with federal and local partners, we have invested almost \$1 billion in vital water and sewer service.

As our nation slowly emerges from one of the worst economic downturns in recent history, many states have seen unsustainable budget deficits and devastating cuts to education and infrastructure. Fortunately, West Virginia has done very well, thanks to the strong fiscal management of the last 25 years. In fact, we were one of only 18 states that weren't forced to borrow money from the federal government in order to pay unemployment benefits. We not only have a balanced budget, but because of careful spending, we have one of the best Rainy Day funds in the country.

I've also made lowering taxes one of my top priorities. West Virginia families will soon have one less thing to worry about beginning July 1st, the food tax will be gone, putting money back into the pockets of hard working West Virginians every single day.

We've cut taxes for our businesses too. The Mountain State has not seen a general tax increase in the past 20 years. We are eliminating our business franchise tax, and we continue to cut our corporate net income tax.

We have also created a number of new laws to protect our West Virginia families. Last year, we took real action and received national recognition as we made our roads safer. It's now against the law to text while driving. We made our mines safer by passing a comprehensive mine safety bill to protect the thousands of miners across this state who work each and every day so we may all enjoy a better life. We passed legislation for enhanced prescription drug monitoring. These new laws are shutting down pill mills and putting an end to doctor-shopping. And we're putting millions of dollars into programs to help those stuck in the terrible cycle of drug addiction.

We made real changes and we have made them by working together, by reaching out across the street, across the state, and across party lines. We've put our families and our communities first. And, I can promise you one thing we will continue putting them first for the next four years.

Because our financial house is in order we can start looking toward the future. We have created thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars in new investments in the past two years.

West Virginia is blessed to have a strong, diverse energy sector. Last year, our state led the nation in coal exports. And I will continue to protect and increase the production of coal in West Virginia.

And we continue to focus on making the most of the tremendous opportunities presented by both the Marcellus and Utica Shale. The Shale development and the potential economic growth and

jobs that will come with the revitalization of the manufacturing sector are astounding; and West Virginia is right in the center of it all.

Working together, we've achieved great things. And I reaffirm my commitment to you today: I will continue to spend every minute working to make West Virginia a better place.

Now, make no mistake, I remain concerned about our future. All of our hard work will be for nothing if jobs are not available and if our children are not prepared to thrive and be productive citizens in our workforce. If our children are to succeed, they must have a world-class education and must grow up in a community free from the temptations and problems associated with substance abuse.

We have hard working teachers. Per capita, our education funding ranks among the nation's best. But on our most important metric student achievement we're falling behind. It doesn't need to be this way and it must stop.

The key to our success lies in making sure our children are prepared and ready to have a successful career in the 21st century economy. That means focusing to ensure our youngest get started on the right track, with meaningful programs designed to make sure that, by the third grade, children have the key building blocks for a lifetime of learning. That means making sure our vocational training programs are responsive to the needs of today's economy. That means making sure our institutions of higher learning have programs designed to prepare our teachers to teach in today's world. That means making sure that teachers have the support they need in their classrooms. That means ensuring our students are guaranteed the instructional time they need to excel. That means giving our school systems the ability to be innovative. And that means making sure parents become more responsible for their children and their learning. It won't happen overnight but we must give our students a better chance at success.

And while we must work on our education system, I also will continue to fight our substance abuse issues in our communities. And I will continue to work to improve our job climate.

Unfortunately, for me that means, in many instances, fighting the federal government to get off our backs and out of our way. But it is a fight I will not concede, and I will never back down.

The solid foundation we have built for our State has given us the opportunity to reach even greater heights in the four years ahead. But I need your help. Let us move forward this day united. I'm committed to working with the legislature to make major improvements for our businesses, our schools, and in our communities.

Again, I am truly humbled that YOU, the people of this beautiful state, have allowed me to continue serving as your governor. West Virginia is a special place. There is no place on earth quite like it, I know: I've lived here all my life.

In this sesquicentennial year, we will pause to remember how far we've come, how we have struggled to get from wilderness to economic progress and development, and to re-commit ourselves to ensuring a greater path for others to follow. Let me be the first to say, Happy Birthday Mountain State. Mountaineers are, indeed, always free.

And for 150 years, the people of the Mountain State have proven to the world that: We work hard. We love our families and our friends. We won't turn our backs on someone who needs help even if we don't know them well. We will fight for what's right, and we will always put West Virginia and her people first.

In this historic year, we seek the leadership of the Lord and the blessings he has so graciously bestowed upon us.

God bless you, God bless America, and God bless the great State of West Virginia.