

Inaugural Address of Governor Joe Manchin III

January 17, 2005

My fellow West Virginians: I am humbled and honored to stand here at this podium today as your Governor. I would not have achieved this distinct privilege if it weren't for the love and support of countless others.

And so, I say thank you.

Thank you to the grassroots supporters who gave so freely of their time and their energy on my behalf starting some 18 months ago.

Thank you to the many volunteers who consistently burned the midnight oil without ever expecting anything in return but a better West Virginia.

Thank you to the thousands of contributors across the state, both large and small, whose generosity helped me communicate my message and ideas.

Thank you to my staff, both those at the campaign and, most especially, those at the Secretary of State's office. Today's celebration is largely due to your hard work and dedication.

Thank you to my friends and family, both here and departed, for their unwavering support and faith. It has been a long journey, and they have stood solidly beside me every step of the way.

Thank you to my children, Heather, Joseph, and Brooke, and to my wife, Gayle. Gayle is my heart, my soul and my best friend. If there is one thing that I am sure of on this extraordinary day, it is that she will make all West Virginians proud.

And, last but certainly not least, I want to say a very special thank you to all of the people who cast a vote on November 2nd - no matter whom you cast it for. By participating in our country's democracy, you are ensuring its survival. Being granted the opportunity to serve each and every one of you at this level means more to me than you will ever know.

I have always thought of public service as the noblest of all professions, and no where is that better exemplified than in the work of the distinguished West Virginians with us here today: Governor Wise, Senate President Mr. Tomblin, Speaker of the House of Delegates Mr. Kiss, honorable justices of our Supreme Court, Senator Byrd, Senator Rockefeller, Congressman Mollohan, Congresswoman Capito and Congressman Rahall, members of our Board of Public Works, members of the legislature.

West Virginia owes these great men and women a debt of gratitude for their willingness to serve, and I personally look forward to working closely with each of them in the days, weeks, months and years to come.

I also want to recognize Dr. Hazo W. Carter, Jr. and the other members of the West Virginia Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission for their dedication to Dr. King and the fundamental ideals of justice, freedom and dignity, and the belief that the time is always ripe to

do right. It is even more special to celebrate this inaugural on the same day that we celebrate the life and vision of Dr. King.

When I first announced my intention to run for Governor in 2003, I said that in order to for us to be successful it was going to take the commitment of business people and laborers; educators and students; lawyers and doctors; Republicans, Democrats, Independents and Mountain Party; civic leaders, public employees, veterans and senior citizens.

At the time, few people thought that a coalition of this magnitude could ever be forged in the state of West Virginia - let alone accomplish something in the process. But throughout the past year and a half those doubters have been proven wrong. We have come together as a state and as a people like never before, because we all understand that things must change, and they must change now. It's no longer good enough for our state to simply survive; it's time instead for our state to be given the freedom to thrive.

So today, it is our responsibility to take the commitment of this great coalition to the next level.

West Virginia's first Governor, Arthur Boreman, asked during his Inaugural address in 1863, "What course should the loyal people of West Virginia now pursue?"

Well, I can tell you this much, business as usual just won't cut it any more - we must pursue a new and different course. The days of giving in to those who would take advantage of our state and our system of government are over. The people of this state deserve better. You deserve better.

Someone once said that there are three essentials to happiness in this life: having something to do; someone to love; and something to hope for.

While we rarely forget the importance of the first two ingredients, we too often overlook the significance of the third - hope.

Without hope, there can be no vision. And without vision there can be no progress.

For that reason, I have great hope for West Virginia.

I have hope for a West Virginia whose government first and foremost treats all its citizens like family and recognizes that when one of us is hurting, we are all hurting.

I have hope for a West Virginia whose people and communities are allowed, and encouraged, to be all that their hearts desire.

I have hope for a West Virginia that recognizes when it comes to problem solving, one size really doesn't fit all. I know and you know, all the answers do not lie under the Capitol dome.

I have hope for a West Virginia that is fiscally responsible and never forgets that taxpayer money doesn't grow on trees.

I have hope for a West Virginia that pledges to help our children find success here, so future generations will live here. So they will be able to enjoy a rich life in the communities and businesses and churches that their ancestors built. So as our children grow, they will be able to

see opportunity here, and raise their own families here. And so grandparents will know their grandchildren from the experiences they share with them and not just from a school photo they get in the mail at Christmas time.

I have hope for a West Virginia that is committed to the fundamentals: affordable healthcare so that every West Virginian, regardless of their age or the size of their bank account, has access to quality care and isn't forced to choose between buying groceries or buying needed prescription drugs; a seamless education system that ensures every teacher has the resources they need to succeed and every student is learning the life skills they need to become a productive member of our state's workforce; a quality of life for our senior citizens and veterans that guarantees their dignity and security, while also offering a reliable and practical support system for their families and loved ones.

And, most important of all, I have hope for a West Virginia that you can be confident is battling on the frontlines every day to save the good jobs with healthcare benefits that we currently have, and aggressively looking for ways to create many, many more.

I have hope for West Virginia, and you should too. Because, as your Governor, I will fight hard every single day to turn the hopes of our towns, our families and our children into real and lasting progress.

But as I've said all along, I can't do it alone. I need your help.

We all must take ownership of our state, and we must be willing to give something back. Ask yourself, what have you done lately for your family, or your neighbor, or your state? What are you willing to sacrifice so that others may benefit?

Standing in front of our Capitol's most historic and well-known statue, Lincoln Walks at Midnight, it is important to think of the risks that were taken by those who came before us so that we could be the free state of West Virginia. Our ancestors, the original Mountaineers, were willing to shake up the system if it meant a better future for their communities and their families. And I believe it is long past due for us to follow their example.

As President Abraham Lincoln said, "Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left over by those who hustle."

And that is why, as my first official act as Governor, I will sign an executive order tomorrow morning calling the members of our legislature into a special session to start Monday, January 24th.

My message has been very clear during the past year and a half. I promised that if elected Governor I would get our state's house in order and open our state for business. And on November 2nd your overwhelming response to that message was heard loud and clear. Now it's time to get to work.

We will restructure our government so that you can be sure we have the right tools for the right job.

I will personally take responsibility for developing a plan to pay off, once and for all, the long-term debts that we owe. Our workers comp debt is the Achilles heel of our state's economy, and I firmly believe that in order to create more good jobs in West Virginia this system must be fixed and it must be fixed now. We cannot afford to wait even one more minute.

And, just like every working family, we will look closely at the money coming in, and the money going out, to determine exactly which credits and debits most affect our checkbook, and yours.

Working together with the legislature, we will put in place a new code of ethics that will hold our officeholders, and all those entrusted to do the people's work, as well as all those receiving public funds, to the highest rules of professional conduct.

My administration's guiding principle during this special session, and the regular session that follows, will be quite simple: Whatever problems you thought you had when you woke up this morning, and whatever burdens you feel you have the responsibility to bear - imagine facing them without a paycheck, as so many West Virginians do today. Odds are your problems, and your burdens, would be magnified tenfold. And that is why it is so important that we open our state for business and get our people back to work.

Make no mistake; progress won't come easily. Tough decisions lie ahead.

I made it clear during the past year and a half on the campaign trail that no Governor will ever ask more of you than I will. I'm not going to drag you back; I'm going to push you forward. Because the further we push each other and the harder we work together, the closer we are to seeing our dreams become reality.

As my late father, John Manchin, used to say, "The road to success is always under construction." Those words have stayed with me and inspired the theme for today's Inaugural celebration. While we fix our sacred Capitol dome, we will re-engineer our government, repair our schools, and revamp our economy. Whatever it takes, we will get this job done.

The only way to ensure real and lasting change once the work is completed and the scaffolding is but a memory is to pledge today to join forces and work together as a united West Virginia. We must promise today to put our individual needs aside and do what is best for our state, our children and our grandchildren.

And as we navigate our way through the opportunities and challenges of the 21st Century, we must never waver from this obligation, and we must never settle for anything less than complete success.

Many people have asked me over the last few weeks that if I were to look back years from now on my administration how would I want it to be remembered. Well, here's the answer: Research done by the America's Promise program shows there are 5 promises that we should make to every child if we want them to grow into competent, caring adults.

And those 5 promises are as follows:

- every child should have a caring adult in their lives;

- every child should have a safe place;
- every child should have a healthy start;
- every child should be taught a marketable skill; and, last but not least
- every child should learn to be a caring adult and be given an opportunity to serve their communities.

I want my administration to be remembered for fighting hard everyday to keep those 5 promises to our children. Because if we commit ourselves to keeping those 5 promises, everything else will fall into place.

It truly is a new day in West Virginia. I want each and every West Virginian to have bragging rights. I want to stop playing defense and start playing offense. So, together, let us grab the reigns of history. Let us write a new and glorious chapter of Mountaineer ingenuity and teamwork. Let us become the next great generation of West Virginians. We must be successful and make no mistake, we will be successful and then our children and grandchildren will be proud to follow in our footsteps in building a better West Virginia.

Thank you, God bless you, and God save the great state of West Virginia.