

# **Inaugural Address of Governor John Jacob Cornwell**

**March 5, 1917**

FELLOW CITIZENS:

In assuming the high office of Governor of this great State two things are uppermost in my mind:

FIRST: A profound appreciation of the confidence imposed in me by the electorate in selecting me as the lone representative of the political party to which I belong, an appreciation which I believe can be better shown by a faithful effort to sustain that confidence than by any words I can utter here.

SECOND: A realization to some extent, at least, of the responsibilities the office imposes, a realization which comes with such force that instead of possessing a feeling of pride at what some might regard as a political triumph I approach the task with humility, with something of trepidation, though with such confidence as can be inspired by the fact that I am free from pledges and promises other than those made publicly and to all the people, as well as possessing an earnest desire to render faithful service to them, as a whole.

The transfer of the control of the State, or any department of it, from one political party to another, naturally brings disappointment to some, especially to those who are possibly to be affected by the change.

Nor can there be waged a campaign for the control of a great State without some bitterness creeping in. as much as the candidates and political managers seek to prevent it, but that bitterness, if unfortunately it is engendered, should end with the political contest. Our Government rests not upon force but upon public opinion and the willingness of all good citizens to accept the verdict of the majority, when the verdict is honestly and fairly rendered, and upon the willingness of the people to peaceably abide by it.

In conforming to the custom of addressing you on this occasion I shall not undertake to outline to any great extent or to any great length any policies or program. True I have in mind some things which I believe should be done that have not yet been undertaken, but before presenting plans and programs it seems desirable to become familiar with conditions to the fullest extent possible and to give very careful consideration to every contemplated change from established policies.

Then, two, I believe the people of the State are just now desirous of freedom from political and legislative excitement. That they are not just now anxious for further radical changes. That they are more desirous of invoking economy and efficiency in the administration of their public affairs than in ascertaining just what new departures may be undertaken.

I further believe it to be their desire that while there be ample appropriations and expenditures of public money for the proper development and maintenance of all the State Institutions, at the same time that no appropriations be made or allowed to stand not absolutely necessary for those purposes. It is equally clear to me they desire no public office filled or continued unless its occupant is rendering actual public service.

For one thing I would enter an earnest plea: the development of a more pronounced spirit of State unity. In the Nation we boast of the American Spirit, of American Ideals, despite the fact that within the borders of our great country are many races and creeds, political and religious and all nationalities. Here in West Virginia we must develop the West Virginia Spirit, West Virginia Ideals and we must cultivate them and live up to them.

I realize it is more difficult to do that in West Virginia than in a State smaller and more compact territorially or in a State where the facilities and methods of communication between the various sections are better than in this State. With a very large territorial area spread out over many mountains from the Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio borders on the South and West to the Maryland and Pennsylvania lines on the North and East; with three trunk line railroads traversing the State in the same general direction and indifferent methods of communication between, it is not strange our people in the extreme sections of the State are unacquainted with each other. They come together occasionally, in small numbers, at political conventions and then there are usually contests between candidates and their friends from the several extreme sections. In certain localities the coal industry predominates. In others gas and oil. In others the lumber industry is or was the chief one, while in other sections agriculture and horticulture are almost exclusive. Each section is more or less suspicious of the others, each more or less selfish with inevitable resultant conflicts in the State Legislature. We should not forget that we are all West Virginians; that we cannot and ought not try to live to ourselves or for ourselves, in any particular section; that any attempt to do so comes from a lack of knowledge of the other sections or from a lack of understanding and appreciation of our full duty to the State and our fellow men.

We must not forget that each and every section must bear their full share, their full proportion of the burden of the State Government and that the State must deal with its affairs as a whole.

Such contests and such suspicions, when they exist, are exceedingly hurtful. We need a frank and clear understanding. We need complete publicity in all public matters and we need a closer acquaintance of the people of the various sections and a spirit of more complete State unity.

To repeat: We must develop and cultivate the West Virginia Spirit, support and proclaim it everywhere. We must make this State not only an attractive place for investments, but likewise the best place in the country to live.

With the progress we are making in Education; with the millions of dollars that are being expended in permanent roads without any State road system, merely by counties and magisterial districts; with our wonderful natural scenery and above all, with a brave, generous and hospitable people as a whole, why should not the investor bring his family and make his home here with us? He will, if he correctly understands us.

Heretofore we have expended much money erecting buildings at the great National Expositions; at Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco where we have exhibited our wares and our products. They were probably good investments. I am not criticising them, but I have some times wondered if it had not been better if the money had been expended holding a State Exposition here at the State Capitol, where the people, of the different sections could have been brought

together to meet and mingle and get acquainted. The non-resident really interested in getting a knowledge of our climate and resources would have come and got it first hand.

In years passed we have been engrossed with what we have termed the Development of the State. That was essential for its Natural Resources were of little value and no benefit to the people as long as they were undeveloped; as long as they remained in their natural state and position. However, we have reached the point, I very sincerely believe, where prompt and serious attention must be given to conservation if we are not to soon see some of these resources utterly exhausted.

I believe the time has come when the State should cease selling the cut-over lands forfeited for taxes and that it should begin a still more earnest effort to protect those lands from fires. The destruction of our great forests and the recurrent fires over much of the areas from which the timber has been removed, preventing reforestation, will inevitably bring radical changes in our annual rainfall that will cause devastating floods in the valleys with greater frequency. The flood in Cabin Creek Valley is what we may reasonably expect elsewhere and oftener if the policy of destruction goes on and our mountain areas are not reforested.

If the State would retain the forfeited cut-over lands and acquire by gift and slow purchase such additional areas as could be obtained at moderate cost and, in the meantime, give still more adequate protection from fires, the returns would be immediate in protection from floods and soil erosion while fifty years hence the lands thus acquired would have become reforested and be a great State asset. They would be of untold value to those who come after us.

A constitutional amendment would doubtless be required to do this but is it not worth immediate and serious consideration?

It is lamentable that so large a percentage of our coal, oil, gas and timber has gone out of the State to build up manufacturing plants and cities in other states instead of being consumed here, but we cannot, by law, compel non-residents to come here, invest their money, build factories and manufacturing plants. Many have come because they have learned of our advantages and find it profitable to do so. Invitations megaphoned from the housetops will not bring them. The raw material is here. We have abundance of water power. There is every inducement from a natural standpoint for hundreds of other industries to come to us and use our products here, but men with money to invest in industrial enterprises are slow to go into states to invest and make their homes where partisanship runs riot; where everything is staked on the control of the State, upon the acquisition or retention of public offices and where a special session of the Legislature may be called over night to change the statute law to suit the whim or caprice of some one clothed with a little temporary authority.

If we desire and expect the valleys of the State to become the industrial hives which the great natural resources and the advantageous geographical location have made possible, we must make politics and political activities secondary. We must become normal, politically, as a State and as a people. We must give more thought to getting better roads and better government and less thought to getting control of public offices by hook or crook and of legislating men in and out of them. We must keep the State out of the freak class, out from under the scare-heads of the

newspapers and make it a less fertile field for the magazine writer looking for a blood and thunder story.

If I can contribute something to that end by putting one branch of the State Government, or a part of it, into noiseless gear, even though compelled to take slower speed, I would vote my administration a success though all men term it a failure.

The subject of closest and keenest interest to the average citizen is Taxation. Taxes are necessary to provide money for the State Government and for the support and maintenance of our various institutions. As the activities of the State are increased, as public institutions and boards multiply and expand, additional revenue must be provided.

That proposition is self-evident, therefore as these demands for more revenue arise it becomes increasingly important that we have the strictest economy in State appropriations and State expenditures of taxes are not to become very burdensome.

In the Primary, as well as in the General Campaign, I promised the people I would appoint a bi-partisan Efficiency Commission to visit the various State institutions and to examine into the various branches of the Executive Department of the State Government, with the expectation that such a Commission of business men would be able to make some suggestions in a report which would lead to more efficient and economic methods in those Institutions and Departments. The people apparently approved the suggestion. Accordingly I prepared and caused to be introduced into each house of the Legislature a Resolution authorizing the appointment of such a Commission, it being provided in the Resolution that the members of the Commission should serve without compensation, but that their expenses should be paid out of the Civil Contingent Fund. I wanted Legislative authority for the appointment of the Commission for two reasons. First: That there might be no semblance of partisan politics in the plan. Second: That the Commission might enter upon the work clothed with the dignity of Legislative as well as Executive authority.

The Resolution passed the House of Delegates. In the Senate it was reported from the Committee favorably, after being amended so as to provide that the Commission should consist of four instead of five members, two Republicans and two Democrats. To that change I most cheerfully assented but notwithstanding it the Senate killed the Resolution.

Why? Did the members voting against it desire to go on record as opposing Efficiency and Economy in the Administration of our State affairs? They have done so and I have no doubt their constituents will make a note of the fact. In any event I hope I shall have the opportunity to call their attention to within the next few years.

Or, were they haunted by the fear that some improvements might result and I might get credit for them? If any benefits are to accrue to the State they were given an opportunity to share the credit for them. That opportunity they have discarded.

If they imagine my every act will be prompted by partisan motives they fail to understand my aims and ambitions. I shall appeal from their petty partisan action to their constituents and I believe that appeal will not be in vain.

I take this occasion, too, to say that despite Senatorial disapproval I intend to carry out my pledges to the people and that I will shortly name the members of the proposed Efficiency Commission. I have been fortunate enough to secure, without cost to the State, the services of an Efficiency Expert of National reputation to assist in the work and I hope and believe some good to the State will result from the appointment of the Commission, but I regret that in this first step I will be without the cooperation of the Legislature, or the upper branch of it.

I shall await the report of that Commission before considering the question of changing the heads of any of the State Institutions for reasons too obvious to enumerate.

Likewise I advocated the establishment of a Budget System similar to that adopted in Maryland by a Constitutional amendment which was framed and recommended by the Goodknow efficiency commission. This Maryland plan was unanimously endorsed at the Governor's conference in Washington, in December last, as well as by the retiring Governor of this State in his annual message to the Legislature. It has been endorsed by the Bureau of Municipal Research and by economic experts everywhere. I prepared and caused to be introduced in each House of the Legislature a similar amendment, embodied in a joint resolution providing for its submission to the people at the election in 1918. The Legislature, or the House of Delegates, by a party vote, refused to submit it, the resolution failing to get the necessary two-thirds vote, so the people will not have an opportunity to express their opinion of this much needed reform in our fiscal methods. I do not intend, however, that the matter shall rest there. During the next two years I hope to create sufficient interest among the people to cause them to pledge the members of the Legislature, irrespective of political party, to submit this question at the next regular session of the Legislature, if not sooner. The people can then determine for themselves whether they want their tax money expended in a scientific and business- like way or whether they want the old log-rolling and backscratching method of making appropriations to continue.

I cannot pause here long enough to discuss this budget matter in detail, but merely to say that the present manner of making and submitting estimates of expenditures and of the requirements of the various State institutions, does not constitute a Budget system, at all, though of course it is an improvement over the old hap-hazard system or rather lack of system and throws some light upon conditions. Members of the Legislature, who are here but forty-five days and engrossed with a great many other things, can hardly be expected to familiarize themselves thoroughly with all the details of the State's fiscal affairs and the requirements of the various departments and institutions.

The Budget system is not a political question, or at least should not be. It is an economic question. I was very much disappointed that politics should have crept into the consideration of it by the Legislature and that the members of that body were unwilling to allow the people of the State to vote on the question of its adoption or rejection and I shall take occasion to discuss it in detail before the people of the State before the next Legislature assembles.

Years ago there was a constant stream of emigrants from this State to the far-west and middle-west, induced by the offer of cheap lands and low rates of transportation in which the railroads here joined, apparently believing they were making money to haul a West Virginian from an

interior county to Chicago, at a low rate, then turn him over to some Western Line which gave him land and made him a settler, so he would grow something for transportation.

Fortunately that is at an end, save that hundreds of young men are still going from our farms and small towns to work in factories and mills of various kinds, in other states, because we do not have the factories here. Fortunately, also, the transportation companies have discovered that it is a good investment to pay to get a man to come into the state and locate along their lines rather than to receive something for hauling him out. They are likewise realizing more and more that the really profitable development from the standpoint of the railroad as well as the State is agricultural development, for that means adding permanent wealth to the State instead of removing it as with our oil, our coal, our gas and our timber.

We need closer co-operation between the State and the Commercial bodies within the State, on the one hand, and the transportation companies whose lines traverse it and in a measure live off it, on the other hand, to bring about a greater agricultural development. We need to utilize the thousands of acres of cut over lands either for reforestation or for the cattle and sheep industry.

In the further and greater industrial development of the State which will come in the future, new problems will arise to be met and solved. These problems will not be economic solely but social, as well. The State has already made headway with some of these and I am proud of the fact that I began the newspaper agitation for the workmen's compensation law, now in force.

Employers of labor, with keen business foresight, to say nothing of the humanitarian spirit, understand that well-paid and contented labor is the cheapest labor; that it is highly desirable living conditions be made just as tolerable as possible everywhere. In fact, the twentieth-century business man is your true humanitarian, for not only has he found it good business to strive steadily for the betterment of the economic and social conditions of his employees but he likewise recognizes that he owes a duty to the State which furnishes protection to him and his property, as well as a duty to his employees, who are his brothers, to join the State cheerfully and liberally in every modern and practical movement for the betterment of the social and economic status of the great army of wage-workers, whether they be organized or unorganized.

It is undeniable that in past years many big business concerns spent more money on agents and attorneys opposing proposed legislation in Congress and in the State Legislatures which would have imposed new obligations on them, than it cost them to comply with the requirements of the statutes when finally passed. Thus acts which we denominate reforms were deferred but rarely defeated, but in every instance the opponents accumulated a large stock of public indignation, public hatred and bitterness, costly possessions, which it has been difficult to eradicate. Another great difficulty lies in the fact where large corporations, under new managements and with modern ideas, have changed their methods and practices and are seeking to obey the laws, because past performances are constantly reviewed by political demagogues or candidates for office, the corporations do not get credit for the change but continue to suffer at the hands of an unrelenting public.

Not all business men, however, big or little, are twentieth century business men, but where there is one, and I believe their number is constantly increasing, he joins hands with the public

officials not only in the proper observance of the laws of the land, instead of seeking to evade or avoid them, but he views the general situation from a broad and patriotic standpoint and cooperates with the State, of which he is an integral part, in its attempt to deal with and solve the problems, social and economic, with which it is constantly confronted.

To the Twentieth-century business men of West Virginia I shall look for support and assistance in the coming four years. In attempting to give them an economic and businesslike administration may we not, at the same time, expect them to join hands with those of us connected with the State Government in every reasonable effort to advance the interests of the people as a whole, and better their social as well as their financial condition?

In this State, as elsewhere, though perhaps not to the same degree as in some others, there are two schools of social and political philosophy, two elements of thought not divided by political lines. We know them as Progressives and Conservatives or Radicals and Reactionaries, according to the humor we are in when we speak of them. The line of demarcation is not distinct and there are varying shades and degrees of thought in each group. To be identified with either is to be persona non grata to the other.

The extremists of each side, while useful as a check on the other, in our efforts to solve perplexing social and Governmental problems, can not be followed too closely or too far.

The one side, impatient of Governmental restraints and Constitutional limitations, whether they understand it or not, are in reality bent upon changing the form of our representative Government, created and designed as it was with almost Infinite wisdom by its founders, into a pure democracy where a hasty or temporary conclusion where prejudice and passion might control, would establish an order without regard to precedent or Constitution. This conclusion, or order, too would prevail only until some other man or group of men appeared on the scene with personality or plausibility sufficient to overthrow it and cause the State or Nation to embark upon a still different course. While these things sound attractive to the masses as constituting "the will of the majority", the final result would inevitably be a change from a Government of law to a Government of men. With Constitutional limitations removed and the restraints of carefully and patiently thought out precedents torn off, where the people could not decide by popular vote - as they could, not possibly do in all the myriad matters of complex governmental life - judicial and executive officers would determine questions of vital importance to our liberties or our properties purely from their judgment or their prejudice as they might happen to be constituted.

Under such conditions every individual, firm or corporation would be sailing on uncharted seas, without compass or rudder, subject to the mercy of the varying winds of public opinion or the caprice or prejudice of public officials. Instead of living under a King and his tyranny we would be living under the tyranny of fear of the Unknown.

On the other hand the Extremists of the other group look upon every effort to modernize our machinery of Government to meet changed conditions; they look upon every effort to place upon property and wealth their proper proportion of the burden of Government, as rank anarchy. They regard as the chief aim in life the creation of fortunes for themselves or their employers and some of them regard the proper use of fortunes luxurious or riotous living, or to be hoarded to

the end, sufficient bequeathed to charity for a monument and the balance passed on to their children who are often weak in body and morals.

They have absolutely failed to catch the spirit of the times and are just as much out of harmony with them as the man who would seek to cultivate his crop with a forked stick. Unfortunately, however, they are more harmful and a greater hindrance to our progress for they usually, if not always, possess wealth or represent some big corporation. In the latter case the greatest injury is inflicted upon their employers.

The true course, it seems to me, the course which I would like to see our State pursue, is the middle course.

Progress without Revolution. Conservatism without Inertia. Moving forward, step by step, keeping on safe ground, but bearing ever in mind that the supreme object with Government as in life, should be to make MEN not Money.

We are living in an age of Progress, of business, economic and Social Evolution - I might say Revolution. The general trend is forward. The man who seeks to arrogate to himself any great portion of the credit for the forward steps of the recent years is blinded by his own egotism. The very atmosphere has been charged with Reforms and reformation. It has come from the great Universities, from Magazine writers, from Socialists and from the type of business men I have just referred to.

Politicians as a rule, do not originate Reforms. They seize onto them as a piece of political driftwood or wreckage, upon which to float into place and power. It is also true that some times the men who shape and enforce our laws affecting business big and little have been, themselves, without any business experience and are therefore unable to do their work in the spirit or with the efficiency needed. Often they fear to consult with business men who could give them advice or information, fearing they will be accused of being improperly influenced by some corporation or interest. At the same time they are willing and eager to meet the heads of Clubs, Societies or Labor Organizations representing votes.

An Executive or Legislative officer, either, it seems to me, should be equally ready to meet the head of a labor organization and a big corporation and to give a patient, impartial and unbiased hearing to each. He should be ready to learn the facts from either side and then determine the right course from the facts disclosed, not from the political consequences to him or his Party, but from his calm judgment in the light of all the facts disclosed.

That course I shall endeavor to pursue, should occasion arise, asking only in each case that the complaint be made in the open and tempered with reason and good faith.

Without adverting to politics, which would be out of place here, I may be pardoned for saying I realize full well that my election, was not a political triumph, in the ordinary sense of the word. Neither was it a personal achievement. It was the result of a growing spirit of independent thinking and voting in the State, especially' in matters where no fundamental political principles are involved. Without the support of thousands of men not of my political faith, who laid aside their political affiliations, I would not be here today. Throughout the coming four years I shall



keep that constantly in mind. I shall not attempt to use the office of Governor and the little appointive power remaining with it since the act of the Special Session of the Legislature, to build up a personal or political machine or to further the interests of the political party to which I belong, except as its interests may be furthered through such acts of mine as might meet public approval. To those citizens, who left their own political party to aid in my election I not only acknowledge appreciation equal to that extended to members of my own party, but to them I express the hope that my official actions will meet their approval and that throughout the coming four years I shall also hope to have their sympathy and support.

Manacled as I shall be, by the recent statutes referred to, which will tend to breed insubordination and conspiracy rather than stimulate loyal and efficient cooperation, I realize full well that I am assuming the office of Governor under great difficulties and with a serious handicap deliberately and wilfully imposed. But I shall do the best I can to take care that the laws are faithfully executed whether those laws are popular or unpopular.

The people, however, must understand that modern, progressive government, with its various boards, institutions and activities, costs much money and they must be willing to pay the price if they desire to maintain it. The high cost of living, too, affects governments as well as individuals. But they have a right to demand that their money be spent honestly, scientifically and economically and that it not be squandered among favorites for political purposes.

Concerned, as we are here today, with State matters; gathered as we are, citizens of West Virginia, to attend upon the induction into office of newly elected State officials, we must not forget that we are also citizens of the United States. In this hour of National peril and National anxiety - for no man knows what the future has in store - we should lay aside all partisanship and all differences as to details in domestic affairs and give virile and united support to the President of our country and stand ready to make any sacrifice, however great, that may be demanded of us.

While our earnest prayers are for Peace, always, yet when a nation drives our commerce from the seas and sacrifices the lives of our people engaged in peaceful and lawful pursuits, that Nation has made war on us and to quietly and tamely submit for the sake of Peace - for the sake of ease and comfort and the continued accumulation of wealth - would involve a loss of National self-respect which would be even a greater loss and a greater calamity than the loss of the respect and friendship of the other peoples of the world.

The man who counsels such a surrender to lawlessness and barbarism will some day be called to account by an indignant people.

I made few promises during the campaign, publicly. I made none privately. I make none today. Promises are usually held too lightly. They are often cheaper than even a "scrap of paper" and often the public fails or forgets to punish their violators. A few righteous acts are worth more than all the glittering promises or vainglorious predictions one can make at a time like this.

Believing, therefore, that performances are better than promises, however well meant, I shall content myself by appealing to the patriotic citizens of all parties for their support and assistance.

I shall doubtless often be misunderstood and sometimes misrepresented but that is usually the lot of a man in public life.

With an abiding faith that the all-wise Creator, through his immutable laws, made it possible for every honest effort to obtain recognition, somewhere and someday; with an abiding faith and confidence in the fairmindedness of the people who, must pass judgment upon my official acts, I am now ready to take the oath of office.