

Inaugural Address of Governor Okey L Patteson

January 17, 1949

Governor Meadows, Senator Vickers, and my Fellow Citizens:

I always prefer to express my feelings and thoughts in frank, understandable and direct language. It is no secret that I am very happy and most grateful. However, this happiness and gratitude which comes from political victory must fade in the light of the solemn obligations and high responsibilities that I have just undertaken. They are assumed, not for myself or for the Party I represent - but they are and shall be undertaken and borne for all the people of my State.

In a democracy, a Governor immediately places himself and his Party squarely on record. I do that now, and I expect to continue that practice, for without the understanding support of the public, my administration cannot be the good administration I want it to be. The record can be made clear by this simple statement - as Governor, my thinking, my proposals, my program, shall not waver from the expressions made or pattern set during the primary - restated in the general election - and which, for the most part, are written into the platform of the Democratic Party. Without fear or favor, I and my Party must carry out those promises and pledges. Our obligation is plain, and with the help of all citizens, we shall reach the goal we have set.

Hence, no real purpose will be gained today by a detailed statement of this program, especially since I will soon have the privilege of appearing before the Legislature and making specific recommendations in all fields of State service. However, it is important that certain broad principles and major policies should now be stated.

First, no program, legislative or administrative, must endanger the financial integrity and soundness of our State. A balanced budget, we must have. Taxation must not become a burden upon the people as a whole or upon any one group of people. Each citizen should bear his fair share of the cost of government, and at the same time, reap his fair benefit from its operation. I hope that increased taxes will not be necessary; but it is my duty to point out that high costs affect government, and that the more we demand of government, the more government will cost.

Next, back of every policy or law which I shall favor must be the general welfare of those thousands of men and women who have never had a special representative to speak for them at the Capitol, or in the legislative halls. As Governor, my actions in a broad sense shall be as their personal representative, and their concern shall be of importance in the administration of State affairs. The welfare and prosperity of these people are closely related to that of the State as a whole. I do not mean that any particular group or interest shall be looked upon with disfavor, distrust, or unfairness, but they generally are well able to present and make known their needs. I merely want the average citizen to know that he has a friend in the State Capitol.

Generally, most of the specific policies and recommendations which shall bear my endorsement will fall within one of three great fields of service to you. These are, without reference to priority - health, education and roads. I definitely want my administration to do something really worthwhile along these lines.

We cannot have a happy, prosperous or democratic State, unless our people are healthy. Is there a greater possession than good health? Too long has our State laid stress upon more material things. I believe the functions, duties and efficiency of many branches of State government must play a more sincere and much greater role in this particular field. To mention a few - the Health Department; better facilities for the training of doctors, dentists, nurses and health workers; our Labor Department, with its vital services to both employee and employer; our Mines Department, functioning in the largest industry in our State; our Workmen's and Unemployment Departments; the Department of Public Assistance, with its humane services to our less fortunate citizens; our public institutions and hospitals; with particular stress upon improvement in food and professional service, and the furnishing of free beds for the tubercular, thus eliminating the so-called "means" or "financial test."

A sound and fundamental education is one of the greatest gifts we can bestow upon our citizens of tomorrow. Our University and other State schools and colleges are of vital importance. They must give maximum service in the most efficient manner. They should all contribute their share within their proper fields. Important as this is, our public schools touch more lives and influence more careers and characters than all the institutions of higher learning. It is here that I believe particular stress must now be laid. Our great army of loyal and patriotic school teachers should be given every advantage which can reasonably be attained for them; but of prime importance is the matter of public school buildings in West Virginia. Without reservation, I favor an immediate, just and adequate program of State aid to our counties for the building and rehabilitation of school buildings and school facilities.

Roads concern every citizen. Too many people, I am afraid, think in terms of getting a road to their community, or one running by their farm or property, or one enabling their children to go to school. Now, these are important, and entirely proper; but in the broad sense, all roads contribute not only to the prosperity and well-being of those who will use them every day, but to every person in our State. The war was a severe blow to our road system. Secondary and farm-to-market roads suffered most, because the emphasis was upon primary roads, as they generally ran through and connected the large centers of population and the industrial areas. However, we are rapidly recovering from that setback, and this year should see the greatest strides in road building, maintenance and repair in the history of our State. That shall be my aim. This Legislature will have the task of writing enabling legislation for the fifty million dollar farm-to-market road amendment to our Constitution. This must be done with dispatch and much wisdom. This money cannot be spent at one time or in one place. That would be unwise and wasteful. But the next four years should bring to West Virginians the best road system that our money can buy. However, we must be realistic. Our roads are costly; labor, equipment and materials are higher today than they have ever been. Roads cannot spring up here and there overnight, but with wise planning and efficient administration, we shall go forward with the sole purpose in mind of bringing the greatest benefit to the greatest number of our people.

As stated, I shall soon detail a program to carry into effect the foregoing, which will also include other vital matters, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and the question of a veterans' bonus; aid to municipalities; publicity and industrial development; agriculture; State and local

finance; civil service; police protection and accident prevention; and other important State services.

I know that the course of government will not always be tranquil or smooth. Unforeseen difficulties will arise, and changing conditions and circumstances may alter a course of action here and there. But in the main, I believe the problems of my administration can be met and solved by adherence to duty and the use of good common sense. No problem or condition is so difficult, but that intelligence, honesty and efficiency can find the right way - which is always the best way. I realize more than any other person the need of the help, the good will, the advice and counsel - not only of my fellow officials and of the Legislature - but of the people of West Virginia. Above and beyond this, however, I shall never believe in the infallibility of my own judgment, or the judgment of others, to a degree which will prevent my seeking guidance at the hand of Him who forever watches over and directs the destinies of all mankind.