

Inaugural Address of Governor William A. MacCorkle

March 4, 1893

My Fellow Countrymen:

In obedience to the time-honored custom followed by those whom the people have called to the office of chief executive of the State, I have the pleasure of outlining to you my policy and giving my views upon the matters pertinent to the State during my term of official life.

The vast progress of our country in commercial and material development, its splendid intelligence and unparalleled civilization, its high culture in the arts and sciences, its grand internal improvements by citizen and government, and, above all, its perfect governmental and individual liberty, fill the mind with wonder and naturally lead us to consider briefly those fundamental and cardinal principles which have wrought this great result. This is especially important, for whilst the cardinal principles of the Republic have produced these great results, still, it is patent to every lover of his country that even now in the midst of this unexampled, abounding, political, and commercial prosperity, such tendencies and principles have already shown themselves as naturally lead to decay and excite the fears of those who love the Republic.

The preservation of the integrity of the power of the Union for the common good, and of the States for local self-government and liberty; the placing by the government of every person, enterprise and section, upon its own merits and resources, allowing each to work out for itself its own salvation; the distinct guarantee by the constitution of the largest liberty to the individual citizen compatible with the rights of others; and the strict adherence to the written constitution, have been the most potent factors in our material progress and unexampled liberty. Above all others, to these principles have been due the glory and prosperity and liberty of our country, and it is only by the strict preservation of the original and cardinal principles of our fathers, that the good citizen can perpetuate this glory and this liberty.

My oath to-day to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State, and my peculiar obligations 'to the State as an official, call most earnestly to my mind, that by reason of the growing centralizing tendency of the general government, its efficiency in execution, its appalling and growing paternalism, and the alarming looseness of the construction of the constitution, that the guaranteed rights of the States designed by the fathers, and embodied in the fundamental principles of the written constitution to hold in check those tendencies of the central government, may be lost sight of, and the government become in time a purely centralized power, or the subject of the caprice of an unregulated and vacillating public. This proposition is already apparent to the good citizen. No longer do we hold to our hearts, as of the first importance, those principles which constitute the frame-work of the government. Such doctrine is considered, as old-fashioned, and already out of date. But, instead, immediate and material results and utilitarianism is arrived at and desired, without regard to the question as to whether, in the attainment of the object sought, the constitution is wrenched and the continual tenure of liberty is made less secure. I do not mean to say for one moment that popular government is a failure. I believe that down in the hearts of the people there is a perfect love of the country and its liberties, but the people, receiving from their father this liberty, and knowing

no other, together with the continued success of our government, are without any feeling of danger of loss of this priceless blessing and, necessarily, give little attention to the tenure of its liberties. This easy condition brings about great danger to our institutions. In this country where there is nothing but the controlling power of the principle of the strict observance of the written constitution, to keep the government within its limitations, and to secure known and uniform action by the government, the absence of this principle leads to the abandonment of the government to mere chance or caprice. The effect of this proposition is already seen in multitudinous ways in the formation of parties and interests looking not to the good of the whole people, but only regarding the selfish interests of a particular class or section; in the general looseness of opinion as to the power and policy of the government, appropriating its powers to the carrying out of any scheme of personal interest, and recklessly using it for any design which desire of personal aggrandizement or political power or political change may demand in new and untried extensions of the power of the general government over the electoral franchise and business interests of the people, and in absolute disregard of the underlying principles of free government. Still further is it seen in the growing unpopularity of all reference to, and treatment of, the constitution and its relations, growing out of its hampering and restraining influences, and a carelessness of effect of any action, whether political or otherwise, upon that instrument. It is true that we are still liberty loving, and in any contest where our liberties are openly involved, the people would defend them to the last, but the danger is, that through this recklessness of its tenure of liberty, and the increasing tendency to its abuse, that the government may be wrenched from its true position to such an extent that vast sacrifices may have to be made for its recovery. There must be, necessarily, strong influences growing out of the various causes already stated and out of the contrariety of the various sectional interests, tending to disregard the fundamental principles of our government, yet the relations of the States to the general government controlled by the written constitution, will, if observed, prevent many evils tending to destroy the perpetuity of the government. Under the constitution, the sphere of the general government is so restricted that it cannot ever legally interfere with, or invade, the rights of particular sections or classes, while the powers of the State government, having a local bearing, leave no interest without ample protection.

I do not seek the criticism of partisanship by these expressions concerning the fundamental principles of our government, but believe that if we would perpetuate the glories of this government, that it will be by a return to, and strict observance of, those fundamental principles which our fathers bequeathed to us as our most valuable heritage, and which, amidst the fierce material struggle of to-day, seems to be out of date and disregarded. Believing as I do, in the honesty and patriotism of the people when their attention is aroused to the subject, even in this era of transition, I do not apologize for the expression of these general principles upon this day and occasion and say that they are the principles which will animate me in discharge of the duties of the high office to which you have called me by your votes.

I am aware of the great responsibility of the executive office, and appreciate the broad range of its duties, and will try not to fall below the standard of the distinguished men who have preceded me as Governors of the State. The duties and responsibilities are, indeed, great; the calling out of the militia; the preservation of peace; the passing upon the question of life and death by the

pardoning power; the power of putting life into the acts of the Legislature, or of rendering them null and void by the exercise of the veto power; the right to call into extra session the Legislature and prescribe the scope of its duties; the practical administration of the Normal schools, asylums, reform schools, university, penitentiary and other State institutions by the appointment of the boards; and the appointment and removal of the various boards and their officers. To the people I promise my best efforts to administer these duties according to the letter of the law, without regard to the clamor of the public or the opposition of any combined influences, and knowing the people as I do, am aware that in that effort I shall have the assistance of all those who love the State and its good name.

There are several matters, however, of great importance to the State and to the people, upon which is due the information as to the policy of this administration for the next four years.

First among these questions of interest to the State, is the question of the ownership of lands.

The State is rapidly passing under the control of large foreign and non-resident land owners. We welcome into our State the immigrant who comes to us with the idea of home seeking and home building with all its profits to the State, with its family ties, with its clearing of the forests, its building of church and school house, its expenditure of all that is made in our State, and its exercise of citizenship. But the men who today are purchasing the immense areas of the most valuable lands in the State, are not citizens and have only purchased in order that they may carry to their distant homes in the North, the usufruct of the lands of West Virginia, thus depleting the State of its wealth to build grandeur and splendor in other States. In a few years at the present rate of progress, we will occupy the same position of vassalage to the North and East that Ireland does to England, and to some extent, for the same reasons. I do not in any way wish to be understood as decrying incoming wealth or offering obstruction to its advent in our midst, but believe that West Virginia, the South and South-west, should take steps to bring into their borders the small immigrant or home builder, and thus, by the actual settlers' efforts, our lands will be developed, those living upon them and spending in our State the fruits of our mines, forests and fields. The effort should be made by us to bring the small settler as well as the large land owner, but not one to the exclusion of the other. At this time, the reflex tide of immigration is again directed to the South and South-west and away from the North-west. Whilst we welcome the incoming of the wealthy land owner, still in my opinion, he should not be welcome alone, but every intelligent effort should be made by the State to induce the small land owner and actual settler to come amongst us. I believe that this is the best corrective of the influence of large non-resident ownership of lands in this State, the burden of which we shall in a short time feel. I shall offer any assistance in my power to legislative or other action, looking to the inducement of actual settlers to come to our State. To this end, I am in hearty co-operation with the Governors of the Southern States, and it is proposed at a very early date to have a convention of the Southern Governors looking to the question of immigration to the South and of actual development of the South. I shall do all in my power to make this convention a success, and to unite in whatever plan is agreed upon to attract to the South and South-west this class of immigration. The great area and richness of our coal and hard wood timber, in both of which we are first in this great-country, the great production of coke in which we are second, and soon will

be first, the great development of railroads, in which last year we were first in the United States, our splendid soil, equitable climate and good school system, all offer unparalleled inducements to the incoming citizen and actual settler.

Upon another question of great moment to our State, and one just now exciting much discussion and action in various parts of the country, I wish frankly to avow my policy. I refer to the question of railroad legislation. In several States, particularly in the South, and in some sections of our State, there is just now a sentiment in opposition to railroads, and people not having at heart the welfare of our State, in order to make cheap popularity for themselves, are insisting on legislation antagonistic to railroad operation and development, and this without regard to the injury or the welfare of the State. As an official, I hold the same views on this question as I did when a private citizen, and freely state my policy as to railroad legislation. Never have we needed railroad development as we do now. With all our vast resources lying virtually dormant, engaged in a fierce hand to hand conflict with Pennsylvania for the coal trade of the South, and West, and Northwest, we need all the development possible. At the same time, in a question between the people and the railroads, I am for the people and in favor of all legislation which will curb and restrain corporate influences from interfering with the right of the people; but seeing that the great wealth of the State can only be unlocked by the breath of the locomotive, I believe that if laws are found necessary for restricting railroads, that they should be the product of wisdom and business experience, and not the result of the demagoguism appealing to the populace for official place. The narrow agrarianism or political exigency demanding undue restrictions on railroad construction and operation, is more hurtful to the interests of the State in its present condition, than the supposed oppression of the railroads. In the South, especially, there have been adopted measures tending to provoke bitter antagonism between the railroads and the people, and these measures in a majority of cases, have been the outcome either of want of intelligence on the subject or emanate from those desiring to make political standing with the people. Seeing around us day by day the marvelous development of our virgin territory by the opening of new railroads, I hope that the Legislature of our State will hesitate before it will adopt any but well considered and conservative measures towards railroads. Believing that this is the best policy of the State, I express my views on this important question without regard to the popularity of those views.

As to the public institutions :

I shall do all in my power to render the public institutions of the State as efficient as possible. I regret to say that there has grown a sentiment in this State, that the public institutions should be managed in the interest of certain firms, officials and associations, and many applications have been made to me to place persons on the different boards, not on account of their efficiency, but in order that certain interests may be subserved, and in order that they may appoint connections, relations or friends to these places in the institutions. It is needless to say that all such applications for office will be refused, and that I shall, without fear or favor, remove any member of any board under my control, who is either directly or indirectly engaged in dealing with any institution with which he is connected, or who is connected with any institution from any other reason than a disinterested desire to serve the State. Believing as I do, that no personal interest should be considered, and that the public institutions of the State are its most sacred trusts and

not personal perquisites of any business or other interests, I shall appoint only persons to those places whose business experience and judgment will guarantee to the State, the most efficient management of the institutions with which they are connected. I am well aware that this course will render the administration unpopular for the time being, but believe that an honest effort to administer the affairs of this State with an eye solely directed to the good of the State, will ultimately meet the approbation of all disinterested and fair minded citizens. To this end, at the assembling of the Legislature, I shall propose a number of changes in the administration of the institutions of this State.

While this is neither the time nor the place for discussion or particularization of these questions, they are of sufficient importance to be outlined; the passage of a law prescribing a penalty for, and prohibiting in express words, the furnishing directly or indirectly, of anything, whatsoever, by any official, to any institution with which he is connected, or from receiving any compensation otherwise than that expressly provided by law; the purchasing of supplies by public competitive contract; auditing of all accounts of boards by the Board of Public Works; the divorcing of the executive management of the institutions from the corrective, teaching, or curative, departments.

Under the wise and able administration of my distinguished predecessor, Governor Fleming, I find that the finances of the State are in good condition, but this year the appropriations have been much larger than usual, and it will require the greatest care and economy on the part of the incoming administration, to so conserve the finances as to save the State from a deficit during my term of office. These increased appropriations on the part of the legislature, have been brought about in a large measure by the furnishing and equipment of the Second Hospital for the Insane, and by the demands of the normal schools for larger facilities for carrying on their work. I give particular mention to the matter of finances, in order to correct the popular and erroneous impression, that there is nearly a million dollars in the treasury subject to the appropriation made by the legislature, for while the finances of the State are in a healthy condition, the expenditures of the State must be met, not by the money in the treasury which is not all subject to appropriation, but by the income during the next two years.

This administration promises a careful and economical management of the financial affairs of the State.

In conclusion, I wish to say to the people of the State that whilst I have always been a vigorous partisan, and while I believe the good citizen, whether official or private, should hold pronounced views on the political affairs of the State and the Republic, yet in all matters concerning the office of Governor, I shall try to so administer affairs that the partisan shall be sunk in the lover of my State, meting out even banded justice without regard to party or color. Above mere partisanship rises the vision of our valleys filled with workmen at their contented labor, sending out to the world the products of the marvelous natural advantages of the State, making her rich, happy, and contented, as she deserves to be. With true patriotism animating us, with honesty and energy and good judgment, attending the people and the administration of the affairs of the State, with our mountains of coal and mighty forests and fertile valleys and intelligent and happy people, I believe that our children will see the fructification of our hopes,

that among the sisterhood of grand States of this Union, West Virginia shall occupy a proud position. With these hopes animating me and relying upon the support of the people, I now assume the duties of the office of Governor of this State.