

Inaugural Address of Governor William G Conley

March 4, 1929

FELLOW CITIZENS : As I stand here to be inducted into the office of Chief Executive of my native State, I am not unmindful of the onerous duties and the grave responsibilities of the office to which you have elected me and the opportunity it affords for service.

I am deeply appreciative of the confidence you have reposed in me, and I hope so to perform my public duties as to retain that confidence, irrespective of political affiliations. I believe, however, in government by party, and I shall serve my party first in the distribution of patronage; but in the enforcement of the laws and in the performance of the other duties of Governor of West Virginia, I shall know no differences due to political party, race or creed, and shall be fair, just and impartial in the transaction of all public business as God gives me the light to see the right.

ECONOMY IN ADMINISTRATION

From all engaged in the public service I shall expect support and cooperation in giving to the people an honest, economical and businesslike administration of every state department and public institution. We must give the best that is in us to the task assigned us to do. We must work with faith and courage. It is not always that faith and courage endure to the end, but if we have an ideal and love for the work in which we are engaged, rather than simply a desire for the pay we receive, we will accomplish results more in keeping with what is expected and demanded by the people of public officials.

We must have faith in West Virginia, faith in our government, and faith in ourselves. I call on the citizenship everywhere to come to the aid of the officers they have chosen and help them make West Virginia the best in the galaxy of all the states in the Union. Let us put spirit into this task, for such makes for excellence. Let us help raise humanity to greater heights of well-being.

NO GOVERNMENTAL COMPETITION

There is a tendency in recent years for government to engage in certain lines of business in competition with its citizens. Such competition is unfair, tends to socialism, and means more and higher taxes.

Some of the institutions of the state are continually reaching out and engaging in business. This aggrandizement should be avoided, for it is the duty of government to see that every citizen has equal opportunity to engage in any lawful enterprise without the handicap of governmental competition. We should have the right to the rivalry of life on a footing of equality of opportunity, for of such has been the upbuilding and glory of America. The door of opportunity must stand ajar, so that all who wish may enter, rich or poor, native or foreign born. There will be no office-holding oligarchy in West Virginia. President Hoover in a recent public address well said:

"Every expansion of government in business means that government * * * is driven irresistibly without pause to greater and greater control of the Nation's press and platform. Free speech does not live many hours after free industry and free commerce die. * * * Every step in

bureaucratizing the business of our country poisons the very roots of liberalism - that is, political equality, free speech, free assembly, free press, and equality of opportunity."

CONSERVATION

We should use our utmost efforts in behalf of conservation of the state's natural resources and for the dedication of such resources to the benefit of all the people of the state. Reforestation is a necessity. Protection against fire and other destructive forces should be an imperative policy of state government.

GREAT NATURAL RESOURCES

We have here great natural resources of oil, gas, coal, fire clay, waterpower, and fertile soil, each awaiting further development. These resources have always been here but are only partly developed. To make them of greater benefit to mankind, they must have new capital, the advantage of sound governmental policies and fine leadership with the vision and energy and courage to turn them more to the use to which God intended. We invite such capital and such leadership, which are sure to give good employment to honest labor and produce greater happiness in our homes. We promise sound governmental policies and the opportunity to succeed.

The women especially are interested in the further development of our natural resources and the building of new industries, for such insures a larger family income, better homes, more comforts, and greater opportunities for rearing and educating a family in keeping with present-day standards of living.

INVITING INVESTMENTS

If we are to have social and economic progress, we must make West Virginia an inviting field in which to live and invest. This result can be accomplished by broadening the usefulness of our educational system; by stricter adherence to, and enforcement of, our laws; by loftier ideals in home life, which will increase the moral and spiritual qualities of our people - an inviting field for the women of our state; by having a higher "regard for those human values that give dignity and nobility to life"; by practicing economy in government and by reducing taxes which are always the foundations of economic progress; by government's staying out of competitive business and leaving an open field for individual initiative and enterprise; by guaranteeing to all the people, native and foreign born, the preservation of equality of opportunity so that every girl and every boy, whatever his station in life, may have an equal chance under the law to succeed. Let the world know that these ideals obtain in West Virginia; that these opportunities are offered, and will be safeguarded, and our future progress, prosperity and happiness are assured.

REDUCTION OF TAXES

During the primary and general election campaigns, I stressed the necessity for strict economy in state government. I did so in good faith, believing the expenditures of money received by taxation could be substantially reduced without lessening the efficiency of any governmental function. I still have faith that it can be done, but to bring it about there must be cooperation of

all state departments, both elective and appointive. I urge that everyone engaged in the public service join me in an effort to lessen the growing burdens of taxation. Each department should cooperate with every other to the end that our labors may harmonize and better serve the state.

Our efforts should be bent toward increased efficiency rather than increased expenditures of public money. Instead of studying new methods of spending more money, let us study new methods of spending less.

STATE ROADS

Last November the people voted thirty-five million dollars additional to be expended in building roads. Although much progress has been made, our public highway system in West Virginia is far from complete. I stand for intensive work in the construction program so that the roads may be ready for use at the earliest possible date consistent with good construction and economy. Overhead costs should be reduced to the minimum and every dollar available spent in building roads.

FOUNDATION OF GOVERNMENT

The foundation of free government consists in holding that public office is a public trust for the good of the state and not for the benefit of the individual holding the office.

In the business of the government we must have economy but not at the expense of efficiency. Employees should not be required to work for less than fair compensation, and they should render honest service for the compensation paid. The state should obtain from all public service a dollar's value for every dollar spent.

EFFICIENCY IN GOVERNMENT

Extravagance in expenditures of money received by the state will not be permitted so far as I can prevent. The state government in all of its departments should be conducted in the same economical and efficient manner as obtains in the best conducted private enterprises. I summon to this task every person in the public service and all other good citizens of the state.

In advocating economy, I do not do so to the extent of hindering advancement and progress. We must continue to advance. We must have revenue to carry on the building programs of our public institutions. We are a growing state and we will keep on growing. But if the people demand, and get, from their government more and more service, they must expect a greater cost for governmental functions, and consequently higher taxes.

LESSENING TAX BURDEN

Some method should be devised for lessening the tax burden, especially upon those lands used for agricultural purposes and for homes. This should be the first thought of the legislature. It is well known, of course, that the great bulk of the taxes assessed against property is not levied by the state; it comes from levies laid by local taxing bodies, the county courts, district boards of education, and municipalities. Some way must be found to reduce this load and, wherever possible, lighten other tax burdens.

In the past sixteen years we have made much progress in the building of state institutions and public roads. During that time we have spent more money in the state per capita through public enterprises than ever before in any like period. Without unduly hampering these activities, we should keep in mind, and have respect for, the burdens upon the taxpayers, particularly at a time when some of our largest industries are in a serious economic condition.

ELIMINATING DUPLICATION

As an aid to reducing taxes, we should avoid the creation of new offices and new commissions. This policy should apply not only to the state but to counties and municipalities.

As a further saving, all duplications in government and useless offices should be abolished. The grouping of agencies devoted to similar major purposes would greatly reduce expenses.

Governmental affairs in like classes of business should be regrouped and centralized. This consolidation would mean greater saving of public funds. For example, the power to purchase all materials, equipment and supplies of every sort paid for out of the state treasury could be conferred on one agency. A board or commission for such a purpose could be created by the legislature out of offices already authorized without adding to the expense of government. Such a board could also salvage thousands of dollars worth of discarded or obsolete equipment, machinery and supplies. Purchases are now made independently by the various departments without consultation. Standard specifications and centralized purchasing would be at least a step toward the goal of lessening the expense of government.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

I favor a fair, just and impartial enforcement of all the laws. As Chief Executive of the state, under the oath of office soon to be taken, I shall deem it my duty to see that they are so enforced.

By an overwhelming vote of the people, and by acts of the legislature, West Virginia is committed to prohibition. We must take no backward step. I am not one of those who believes that dry law enforcement is a failure. Experience teaches us that all great reforms come slowly and that all laws are, at times, violated. It is not different with the great moral and economic reform brought about by the Eighteenth Amendment and the enforcement laws enacted thereunder. The prohibition laws are no longer an experiment. Crime cannot be permitted to break down and force the repeal of laws violated, and so long as these laws are not repealed, it is the solemn duty of all law enforcement officers, state, county and municipal, and of the people of the state to help enforce them. No greater tragedy could happen to the American people than a recession in this movement and, to that extent, the admission that government is a failure.

Successful enforcement of law requires the cooperation of all good citizens. Officers must remember always that it is their duty to enforce the law fairly and impartially, and in enforcing it must themselves keep within the law. To aid in this great work, the church and the civic organizations can well afford to renew their campaign of education for law enforcement. I call upon all officers, all citizens of West Virginia to aid in the enforcement of the laws and to join me in observing them.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

There is much talk about the failures of justice but little about its successes. Its successes are scattered throughout the land. In many places civil suits are disposed of justly and promptly. Many criminals are being caught and convicted without unnecessary delay. The public is rarely informed of this good work, but is always informed of the crimes committed. Little is known today of law administration or enforcement but much is known of law violation. To inform the people of success in law enforcement is a fertile field of usefulness for the press of the land.

WATER POWER LEGISLATION

During the campaign I made the following statement on waterpower development in West Virginia:

"I favor water power legislation. I am wedded to no particular bill, but believe that whatever legislation is enacted should be sufficiently liberal in its provisions to bring to this State unlimited capital and diversified industries. At the same time it should conserve and fully protect every right and every interest of our state and our people. In no other way can the people, in the years to come, enjoy the full blessings of this great undeveloped natural wealth. Our vast water power remains unharnessed, and has not been turned into revenue for the State and prosperity for its citizens. This great source of power should be developed for the use of the industries and businesses already here and those that are sure to come under proper legislation.

"We have been investigating the question for years. We had a Water Power Commission in 1921, which made a comprehensive report. We had another Commission in 1925. This Commission had before it the water power laws of other states and complete reports from able engineers. All data is at hand from which to draft a proper and fair bill. The time is here for action, and I favor any kind of bill that will protect the interests of the people of this State and, at the same time, be reasonable and fair to those who must furnish the money for the development. There must be mutuality, otherwise we will have no water power development."

I still stand upon that declaration. Water is the last great natural resource left vested in the citizens of West Virginia. It should be made to yield its full economic service without delay. It will be unwise to pass laws to develop only isolated projects. Any legislation enacted should secure a comprehensive development of all the water power resources of the state and provide for a fixed, reasonable revenue. The interests of our citizens should be fully safeguarded.

West Virginia should assert its paramount right to control and regulate waterpower development, and to recapture waterpower projects, if any, licensed under the Federal Power Act. In my opinion, Congress has not the power in times of peace to go within a state and develop its resources in water power or in any other natural resource without the consent of the state.

EDUCATION

I have faith in the public school system of West Virginia, and urge the further development of our schools and the liberal, yet economical, financing of them. Every child of school age should have the right of an equal opportunity for an education. West Virginia cannot afford to do less

than her best for the youth of the state. Education is the only way to continue our freedom and achievements. So long as the money is well and economically spent, we can make no just complaint.

What has been said of the free schools can be said with equal force of our institutions of higher learning. In this connection, I suggest that a research department be established at West Virginia University and liberally provided for. A great field of usefulness lies before it. It should be one of our greatest factors for the training of our young men and women, for the development of our state, for the expansion of business opportunities and for the establishment of new industries.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

I favor an amendment to the state constitution making the Governor the budget officer in lieu of the present constitutional provision making all seven elective state officers the Budget Commission. Experience has proved that the present plan is not satisfactory. It does not accomplish the results anticipated - economy in the expenditure of public money. If, in the wisdom of the legislature, it is thought desirable, the suggested constitutional amendment need not take effect until the incoming of your next Chief Executive.

I favor also the proposed constitutional amendments changing the date of inauguration of the elective state officers, creating the office of lieutenant governor at an annual salary not to exceed \$1,000.00, providing for the fair and reasonable classification of property for purposes of taxation, transferring the powers of probate from the county courts to the circuit courts, and permitting more than one circuit judge in a circuit when the prompt administration of justice requires.

TAXATION

West Virginia has advanced along all lines of human endeavor. We face the future with confidence in our ability to keep abreast in the march of present day progress and civilization. To do so, we must have a sound, economic policy which will continue to bring new capital into the state and make West Virginia a greater industrial center that will invite sound investment and will protect legitimate business that gives employment at good wages to honest labor.

The tax question is always with us, and has been with all people since government began. It will continue so long as government lasts. Our tax program should be planned on the amount necessary for the state to spend to function efficiently; not on the policy of getting every cent possible and spending it. The expense of government should be distributed fairly on all taxable sources, so that each would pay its just proportion and no more. Every class of industry, enterprise and effort should be treated fairly and given to understand that it will be so treated. When all groups of taxpayers understand that they will be treated fairly and equitably, the jealousies and apprehensions that now exist among them will disappear and we will be in better position to arrive at a more just and equitable system than now prevails.

An eminent writer on taxation has laid down the following seven requisites of a sound tax system:

First, it must ensure fiscal adequacy. That is, it must be productive of sufficient revenue to meet the needs of the state.

Second, it must be economical in administration. A tax that costs fifty per cent to collect is a poor tax.

Third, it must be just and equitable in its application, so that all citizens may bear their fair share of the tax burden.

Fourth, it must be elastic, so that it may have the capacity to respond quickly to changes in the demand for revenue.

Fifth, it must be simple in its terms and in the process of administration.

Sixth, it must be diversified, so that there will be a number of different taxes, properly coordinated, to form a unified and consistent whole.

Seventh, it must be flexible, so as to permit the legislature to pass laws in keeping with changing social and economic conditions.

I commend these principles to the legislature for consideration in dealing with the tax question.

AGAINST HASTY LEGISLATION

I appeal to the legislature not to enact hasty and ill- advised legislation. Legislative experimentation is dangerous. All legislation should be carefully considered and, within the exceptions provided by the constitution, only such should be enacted as will have a statewide perspective and do the most good for the greatest number.

SERVICE TO THE STATE

I shall devote such energy and ability as I possess to the duties of the office I this day assume, with a firm resolve to pursue the course that will best serve the state. To this end I ask the cooperation of my fellow workers.

I hope I have the vision, understanding and sympathy which wills me to know the needs of the state and of our people, and the courage to do the things necessary to fill those needs.

Having earned my living by the sweat of my face, I know something of the hopes and aspirations of those who toil; having, in a small way, employed labor, and as an attorney having represented both small and large business, I know something of the difficulties of both the employer and the employee and the necessity for understanding and cooperation between the two.

PLEDGES FAIR DEALING

As your Governor, I shall deal fairly and justly with all. The only ambition I have is to do the right at all times and under all circumstances, and honestly and impartially, to the best of my ability, to serve all who are entitled to the protection of a righteous government.

Let us all strive to advance the ideals of good will and of law and of peace.

Asking and relying on the guidance of an all-wise Providence and the aid and cooperation of my fellow citizens in the performance of the duties of the high office to which they have elected me, I am now ready to take the oath of office and assume its responsibilities.