

Inaugural address  
of

James H. Douglas

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**Inaugural Address**

Governor Douglas then presented the following remarks.

“Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the General Assembly, distinguished guests, fellow Vermonters:

“Today we begin anew as we celebrate our past and look forward to the future.

“Nearly 11 and a half years ago, a young physician received a phone call informing him of the untimely death of a governor who had come to personify Vermont. He finished the examination, put down his stethoscope, removed his lab coat and traveled to Montpelier to take the oath that would transform him from an untested part-time lieutenant, into captain of the ship of state.

“Today, like his predecessor, that doctor-Governor has come to exemplify Vermont. He will be remembered as a competent, compassionate and forthright leader who always sought to do right by the people. On behalf of a grateful state, thank you, Howard Dean, for your two decades of service to Vermont.

“No one could be standing here today without the support of a loving family. Thank you, Mom and Dad, my two sons, Matt and Andrew, and thank you especially to Dorothy for your steadfast support and for all of your sacrifices.

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“We have traveled a great distance since the first Vermont government met in March 1778. At that time, there were no laws, no taxes, no agencies or departments, just a people determined to live free and by their own values.

“Our very right to exist was challenged not only by the British, but by Revolutionary America itself. Within a few short years, however, the people of Vermont had not only secured our right to exist, but we were being welcomed as the fourteenth star on the flag of a nation that would come to be known as the greatest beacon of liberty in human history.

“In the 225 years since that first government met we have faced many challenges. War has visited the Green Mountains on two occasions. National recessions periodically depleted our resources and, temporarily, our aspirations. Natural disasters, like the 1927 flood, devastated the state, but reinforced our commitment to each other.

“We have responded to our greatest challenges, not by putting aside our differences, but by building on our common understandings. Seeking that common understanding was what Vermont’s founders called civic virtue.

“I am a graduate of this House. Thirty years ago this week I took my seat as a representative from Middlebury. America was in the midst of a long and divisive war, and a presidency was crumbling under the weight of scandal inspired by politics run awry. But here, tucked among the rolling hills of Vermont, under this dome, men and women of good will met, and progress triumphed over partisanship.

“I pledge to you that I will carry on the Vermont tradition of civic virtue. I will be a willing listener and a reasonable partner. My intentions will be sincere, my word will be my bond, and while we may not always agree on approach, our goals are shared.

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“We are confronted today with challenges of great proportions.

“The people have tasked us with bridging our differences to meet common ideals. Chief among those ideals is restoring the hope, opportunity, and dignity that come with a good and secure job.

“An extended economic slowdown has indiscriminately cast thousands of Vermonters into unemployment, and a cloud of uncertainty lingers on the horizon as our economy teeters precariously between recession and recovery. For too many of our neighbors, high hopes have turned to deep concerns, and the bright promise of a new century has been dimmed by anxiety about the future.

“Making recovery more difficult is the reputation Vermont has earned as a particularly challenging place to do business and create jobs. This is a burden not borne for long by large employers. They can always find someplace else eager to accommodate them.

“But the burden that large businesses can escape falls hard on small businesses, and especially on the working men and women of this state who have few options. They can uproot their families and follow the jobs – and many have – or they can wait for a change – and many do.

“And so my message to the people of Vermont is, change begins today – not change for the sake of change, but change for the sake of progress.

“The change I have called for, and which the people have affirmed, will not come overnight. My vision for Vermont’s economic future is not one of quick fixes or government gimmicks. It is one of careful consideration, common sense planning and prioritizing, and a new role for government that puts power back in the hands of people.

“After all, government does not create jobs; people do. But government can encourage economic growth by fostering an environment that welcomes job creation, bolsters business, promotes commerce and serves people.

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“Conditions such as the ones we face today require that we take a close look at what we can do to improve not only the economy, but also the government. Tough times like these reveal where government’s good intentions can fall short of sound and sustainable budgeting.

“Fiscal responsibility means not only planning for today, but also planning for an uncertain tomorrow. And so we are rightly charged not only with addressing today’s afflictions, but we are morally obligated to address impending deficits that will burden our children if we do nothing. We must begin to act now.

“In two weeks I will propose a budget that will avert a deficit that would delay recovery and threaten future prosperity. It will also begin to slow the planned growth of government in future years which, left unrestrained, would endanger programs critical to the most vulnerable among us.

“The greatest threat to these important programs is not from those who would restrain them, but from those who would allow them to grow so big that they collapse under the burden of their own weight.

“I reserve the bulk of my remarks on the budget and other subjects until later this month, but let me be clear: the choices ahead will not be easy.

“I would also remind you that state government is not alone in facing tough times. Thousands of Vermont’s families have to balance their budgets despite less income, and they expect us to as well; we must not bend to the temptation of dipping even further into their pocketbooks to do it.

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“As we begin the task of putting Vermonters back to work, let us take stock of our assets. We have two great economic advantages – our natural environment and Vermonters themselves.

“Generations of Vermonters have been blessed by a landscape that nourishes the soul. We are a leader among states and nations in protecting the quality of our water and air, and we will continue in that role.

“There are some, sincere but misguided, who would have us believe that jobs exist at the expense of the environment. There are others, equally sincere and equally misguided, who believe that environmental protection comes at the expense of economic progress.

“However, the choice we face today is not a choice between jobs or the environment. It is a choice between both or neither.

“I believe in a third way -- The Vermont Way -- that recognizes the codependence of our economy and our environment. My administration will work on behalf of each so that we may improve on both.

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“President Coolidge spoke of the Vermont appeal when at Bennington he made these memorable remarks: “I love Vermont because of her hills and valleys, her scenery and invigorating climate, but most of all, because of her indomitable people.”

“It is the people of Vermont who represent our greatest hope and best opportunity for a brighter tomorrow.

“It is the construction worker, the nurse, the firefighter and the farmer, the teacher and the student on whose foundation we prepare to build a future of prosperity. Our people are blessed with creative minds, industrious hands, common sense and a determined spirit.

“I will seek their guidance, rely on their wisdom and trust in their judgment. I will listen to them, and in order to get our state back on track, I will invest in them -- in their education, in their skills and in their entrepreneurial spirit.

“The moment is fitting to remind ourselves that as officers of government we are servants of the people, one and all; that our authority is derived from them, and therefore, as our Constitution demands, we are “at all times...accountable to them.”

“I shall instruct all who serve in my administration of the same as we endeavor toward government that works with you, not against you; a government that serves as an ally, not an adversary.

“I will seek to change the culture of government from one that is so attached to the status quo it resists even those changes that will move us forward, to one that embraces positive change.

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“We are in the infancy of an era of technological progress that has changed the way the world does business. Government, too, must change the way it does business. We must better utilize technology to improve the convenience and accessibility of government services. Across the government, we can do more so Vermonters can save time by being online rather than in line.

“Vermont’s economy has been slow to make the transition to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have not fully embraced advances that make it possible for Vermonters to operate in a diverse, high-wage economy, even while working from the most remote corner of the Northeast Kingdom.

“Cutting-edge clean technologies have sprouted businesses that do not compete with the environment, but rather compete with each other to achieve a cleaner environment. Welcoming these businesses to Vermont, and encouraging their innovation and growth will allow us to promote Vermont values around the nation, and indeed around the world.

“We must embrace innovation all around us. Creative ideas can expand access to affordable health care to every Vermonter; improve quality, comfort, and convenience, while giving patients and doctors more control over health care decisions.

“New approaches can improve our schools while increasing the role of parents in their children’s education. Working families need to know that their young children will have the early care and education they need to thrive. And they need to know that their kids are getting a truly equal opportunity at success.

“Act 60 promised equal educational opportunity for every child while reducing property taxes. Instead, many of our children are still not receiving the education their parents are paying for, even as property taxes continue to skyrocket.

“We need to work together to find a better solution – a solution that recognizes the importance of money, but also recognizes that our commitment to equal educational opportunity is not fulfilled by funding formulas, sharing pools and block grants.

“If we are serious about every child attending a safe and drug-free school; every child having access to the best teachers and the best curriculum; if we are serious about accountability; if we are serious about every child having an equal chance, shouldn’t every parent have an equal choice?

“My administration will seek to unleash the pent up creative energies of a people frustrated by unnecessary barriers to opportunity. We will start by fixing a broken permitting system that has become too costly, duplicative, unpredictable and often times contradictory, not by weakening our commitment to the environment, but by strengthening our commitment to common sense.

“When we speak of economic progress let us not forget the industry upon which Vermont was built and which, in a changing economy, we have too long neglected. Let us renew our commitment to the family farmers who have contributed so much to Vermont’s character and whose lives are dedicated to feeding others, but who now struggle to sustain themselves.

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“I have spoken about ways to expand opportunity for Vermonters. But today hope and opportunity are being destroyed by the insidious effects of hard-core drugs. By now, we’ve all heard of families and lives torn apart by drugs. I am reminded of “Sarah,” a 19-year-old Vermonter who died of a heroin overdose. Sarah was a typical kid with big plans for the future. She was working two jobs with plans to go to college and eventually open a business of her own.

“But alcohol, then marijuana and cocaine clouded her horizons. Before long, heroin found Sarah, and the sun set on what was once a promising life.

“For a moment, I want you to think not just of Sarah, but of your own children and what could happen if they meet the wrong person on a particularly tough day. Sarah’s story isn’t the story of just one girl, but of a growing number of Vermont’s young people.

“We must do more to protect our children from the life-destroying effects of these drugs. Some of it is tough love, and some of it is just plain love. We will address addiction with a compassionate program of treatment and rehabilitation. And we will educate kids about the dangers of drug abuse so they will have the strength and courage to reject them.

“But we will also aggressively combat those who would seek to poison our children for profit. All drug dealers will know that they are unwelcome on our streets, in our neighborhoods, around our schools – anywhere in our state.

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“With change comes great opportunity. But we must also fiercely defend the values that are woven deep into the fabric of our state.

“The best of Vermont is the product of those unchanging ideals of family, faith, freedom and unity.

“There is little government can do that can match the compassion of the family; nothing it can do to match the power of faith.

“For freedom, generations of Vermonters have fought heroically at home and abroad -- at home to gain independence and end slavery; abroad to defeat totalitarianism and fascism; and today, across the globe, to vanquish evil and terror. To the men and women who loyally guard our freedom, we thank you for your courage and sacrifice.

“While Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys made famous Vermonters’ attachment to individual freedom and liberty, we are united in our common concern for the most vulnerable among us.

“Our rural nature has always instilled in Vermonters an independent spirit, but it has also encouraged a sense of obligation to neighbors in need. We are proud to do for ourselves all that we can, and eager to aid others where they cannot.

“Around our state, dedicated Vermonters work together to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and protect the weak.

“These times call for a renewed sense of service to the community, and there is plenty for everyone to do. I ask all Vermonters to dedicate more of their time and talent to worthy causes.

“Nor shall we in this chamber forget our obligations to do for others those necessary things they cannot do for themselves.

“Let our own examples here restore faith in government as a noble calling, and inspire other honest, wise and good citizens to public service.

“The challenges ahead are difficult. In some areas, progress will be slow, but it is certain.

“And so today we celebrate a new beginning and begin to implement the change for which the people have called. We will keep what has worked, discard what has failed, rein in our excesses and proceed forward with a bold agenda of renewal.

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“When I arose today, it was cold and dark. The sun had not yet reached the eastern shores of New England, nor begun its climb over the Green Mountains.

“As I have for the past 30 years, I traveled through the morning darkness on the journey from my home in Middlebury over Appalachian Gap to Montpelier.

“As I began to wind along the mountain road the darkness slowly waned and pine boughs emerged from under a shroud of snow. Not even the frost of winter could dim the color of our hills or restrain the advancing dawn.

“So long as we serve, so long as we strive, so long as we have the courage to lead, the promise of Vermont will remain ever green. Our promise will be strengthened by the seasons – through the bitter winters and the brilliant mornings – and made eternal in the sacrifice we share.

“Together, and with God’s help, we shall meet the challenges ahead, as we have all others, so we may welcome a springtime of hope and a blossoming of opportunity to this “brave little state of Vermont.”

“Thank you.”