

Farewell address

of

Howard Dean

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Farewell Address

Governor Dean then presented the following remarks.

“Thank you.

“This is something that I’ve wanted to do for a long time, and that’s to give a speech without a written text. I don’t like to speak from a written text, but every time that I’ve come before you other than for end of the session speeches, which usually are at three o’clock in the morning, I’ve had to speak from a written text. So who knows what may happen. But I cannot resist -even though what should be a very solemn occasion, and it is one - passing on a remark that the Speaker, who I congratulated on his newly re-elected position, passed on to me as we got here. He said, “You know, Governor, this reminds me of something that you said to me last year at this time, which is that they always clap the most when you’re going out.”

“Twenty years ago, to this day, I was right over here in seat number 26 with Bob Harris on one side and Gino Sassi on the other, and there are not a whole lot of people here who remember Gino and Bob, and they were great people, and I learned a lot. I just want to first say, that those of you who are new to this body are about to come into an extraordinary experience, because the legislative body is a place where you learn an enormous amount about Vermont and where you really do give back to the people who sent you here. It’s a huge honor, and it’s also an enormous amount of fun. It brings up, in my mind, what an extraordinary thing having a citizen legislature is. A citizen legislature is about people who do their job in the legislature part-time, then go home and do their other job part-time as well. It has a wonderfully refreshing effect on democracy, because you have to live with the laws that you pass. I’ve always believed that this country would be better off if every legislature were a citizen legislature. And, this state is better off because of it. I congratulate you. I thank you for the very, very, hard work that you’re about to do.

“One of the things that’s important as a citizen legislature is that you will make friends, and you will make friends, I hope, across the aisle. Some of your close friends will be of the opposite party than you are, because the people sent us here not because we were Republicans or Democrats; they sent us here because we’re Vermonters, and we’re Vermonters above all else. In that spirit, I want to urge you to join me in supporting Governor-elect Douglas, because it is in our best interest as Vermonters that Jim Douglas have a most successful Governorship. And I intend to do my part to make sure that he could. Jim, please stand and be recognized.

“I have a lot of “thank you’s”, and I hope you’ll bear with me.

“The first thank you I want to say, and it also pertains to those of you who are sitting in this chamber, particularly for the first time. Politics is a business where we need to go out and convince people that they ought to vote for us. So, we tend to emphasize all the things that we have done as individuals that require people now to vote for us in exchange. But, the truth is that not one of us - not me, not you, not any elected official - ever accomplishes anything by oneself. And, for the eleven and a half years that I’ve been extraordinarily privileged to serve you and the things that I’m most proud of - fiscal discipline, health insurance for all kids under 18, kids’ prevention programs, conservation of hundreds of thousands of acres, all these things – state buildings and downtowns – all these things were done with lots of help. The first people I want to thank are the extraordinary people in the administration - Secretaries, deputies, commissioners, deputy commissioners and particularly the staff on the fifth floor. And, I’d like to ask them to rise, and I thank them very, very much.

“I also want to thank a group of people who never get enough credit, because we’re always tempted to blame faceless people in the bureaucracy when things don’t go well. But the truth is that not one implementation of any bill which is ever passed by you or signed by me would ever be done if it were not for the roughly 7,500 people that worked for us as salaried employees. I would like to ask all state employees in this building to stand up and be thanked for eleven and a half years by me and all of us who owe you so much for delivering on the things we’ve been asked to do.

“Finally, on a very personal – actually not quite finally – on a very personal note, I think only Jim Douglas will know why, and he won’t know this for a while, but he’s beginning to learn it now, will know why I’m about to thank the next group of people. Because there’s one group of people that spends more time with me,

that are state employees, than anybody else, and they have a serious charge – and worked very, very hard – I would like to thank all the members of the State Police detail who have been with me for eleven and a half years. Please rise, past and present. Thank you very much.

“I have two more thank you’s.

“The first is – that I would be remiss if I did not thank a man who has given a great deal of his career to the people of this state, who is a committed idealist, a hard-working person, someone that I owe a great deal and I think that every person in this state owes a great deal to. I would like to ask Lieutenant Governor Doug Racine to stand and be recognized and thanked.

“Lastly, the most important thank you. This is a thank you to the people of the State of Vermont. You have sustained me and supported me through some very, very difficult times and some very wonderful times. You have allowed me to be in the greatest job in the State of Vermont longer than anybody else in 200 years. I cannot tell you how grateful I am. Many of the ideas that we have put forward, that you have passed, have come from you. They’ve come from conversations in general stores and in hockey rinks. They’ve come from general conversations on main streets. Every year after the Legislature closed, I used to go on a tour of Vermont - election year or no election year. And, over that next month of two I just listened to ordinary Vermonters telling me their stories, telling me their hopes, telling me their dreams, telling me their sorrows. And out of that would come most of the legislative agenda for the following year. This is the people’s House, and I’ve been very, very proud to be able to start my government service in this House, and I’m very, very grateful to the people of this state who allowed me to stay here for 20 years. I deeply thank the voters and the people of this state.

“The exercise that we begin today, with the election of officers, and tomorrow the election of the Governor, is an extraordinary process which is a relatively new process in modern history - the peaceful transfer of power between two unrelated individuals, and in this case, between different parties. We are extraordinarily lucky to live in a country where this exists, and we too often take it for granted. In Vermont it is a particularly extraordinary ritual because of the extraordinary state that Vermont is. We are in many ways unique. We have a citizen legislature, we have growing diversity, we have a sense of community that many other states never have except when tragedy strikes. And yet we have it every day. I ask you to remember, as you continue in your public careers here in Vermont, how lucky we are. How lucky we are that we live in a state where you can have a big argument with somebody at town meeting over the school budget; and three days later, if their barn burns down, you are there with a covered dish. We live in an extraordinary society because we deeply value each other as human beings. I think that Vermont is the way that America ought to be. America would be a stronger country if we valued each other as human beings more. America would be a stronger country if we admitted that we were dependent on each other, and that we were responsible for each other and that we were connected to each other. Every human being, whether we like them or not, we are connected to, and we have a obligation to, as fellow Americans and as fellow human beings.

“I have been so proud, and so privileged, and so honored to serve as Governor of a state where, at our core belief of who we are, we believe that. Whether we are Republicans, or whether we are Democrats, or whether we are Progressives, or whether we are Independents, we believe that. There are friendships that you will make in this body and beyond as your careers prosper that will remind you every day that it is important who somebody is, not what they are. We can set an example for the rest of this country, because these are values that used to be very American, and we’re starting to lose them.

“As the middle class gets more and more pressed by a more and more global society, more and more difficult society economically, what I have tried to do in Vermont, above all, is to build what I call a middle class safety net. So that two wage earners in a family, who often may hold three jobs, working hard to make ends meet may someday hope that their kids will be able to go to college just as we were. This is the first generation where we are facing, where it’s more difficult for parents to pay for college than it was for my parents’ generation, and we can do better. You have in this room, over the last twenty years that I have served, made sure that that was fixed in Vermont. With your generous support of higher education, your generous insistence and support of VSAC, the things that you have done – this is a Legislature with a heart. I mean that

about all Legislators - Republican, Democrat, Independent and Progressive - because I know. I tried to push back on the budget. It didn't matter who was in control; you still wanted to support all those programs. But I salute you for that. I do want you to be fiscally conservative. I think Jim will be fiscally conservative. I want him to succeed, and I want you to pay attention to what he says. But I am proud in a way – although we had fights about the budget and how much money we were spending – I am proud because what was in your hearts at those times was supporting the people who sent you here. A recognition of how tough it is to make a living and how difficult the circumstances can be to send kids to college and to hope that your kids do better than you did. That's not the case everywhere in America. There are an awful lot of legislators that forget who sent them here. There are an awful lot of people in government who have forgotten how tough it is to make a living. And as long as Vermont believes in the values that you hold today, strong rural values of community, where we truly believe that all of us are responsible to each other, this state will continue to be a great and wonderful state, and my job, that I've had for the last eleven and a half years, will continue to be the greatest job in Vermont.

“Thank you very, very much.”

Dissolution

The Governor, having completed the reading of his farewell message, was escorted from the Hall by the Committee appointed by the Chair.

Thereupon, the Joint Assembly dissolved.

DAVID A. GIBSON
Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly