

Executive Speech
of
Isaac Tichenor
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Speech of Gov. Tichenor – 1803.

Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

We are again assembled to devise and adopt such measures as will promote the great interest of our fellow citizens.

In the exercise of the duties assigned to us, it may not be unprofitable to look back to the infant state of our Republic, from thence trace the measures pursued by our venerable fathers, to whose wisdom and firmness we are indebted for the rank and privileges of an independent state. It is a tribute justly due to their virtues, thus publicly to acknowledge, that the evils arising from divisions and party spirit, were not known in their legislative councils. Their appointments to offices were fixed on men whose disinterested zeal for the public good was manifested more by their acts than their professions. A patriotic spirit of union, in Council and measures, animated their administrations. They subdued the wilderness, they sowed the seeds of science and the arts, and the elder states saw, with surprise, a few united and virtuous Citizens demanding as their right an honorable station among her sister states. It should be remembered, that it was union alone sustained them, in their infant struggles for right, in their noble exertions for sovereignty. It is wisdom in us to adhere to those rules and maxims, by which they regulated their conduct, and like them, to make the general good the great object of all our public measures.

One important part of the business assigned to us, by the Constitution, is the appointment of public officers; our duty in this respect is plain and easy to be understood: the wisest and best men, those who by precept and example, will cherish obedience to the laws, are evidently the most proper candidates. And while we aim to appoint only such to office, there will be no room for party views and interest to influence our proceedings.

The enacting of laws should ever be a business of mature deliberation. The happiness and safety of society does not depend on the multiplicity of its laws. Laws should be few in number, explicit, and duly enforced. What the operation of a law will be, upon a community, the most discerning cannot often foretell. A partial evil is sometimes noticed upon the promulgation of a law, which is often greatly overbalanced by its more general and beneficial effects. The only sure mode of deciding upon the merits of a statute is to submit to the process of partial experiment. Hence it follows, that Legislatures should be as careful in repealing as in enacting laws. Among the public acts passed by the last General Assembly, it is believed that the act relating to insolvent debtors is not sufficiently explicit and guarded to secure the rights of Creditors, and afford the remedy intended for Debtors. An investigation, by an Assembly possessing accurate knowledge of the operation of this statute, and of some others recently enacted, will determine if amendments are necessary.

By the twenty fourth Section of our Constitution, in order to make sanguinary punishments less necessary, it is strongly recommended, "That means should be provided for punishing by hard labor those who should be convicted of crimes not capital; whereby the criminal shall be employed for the benefit of the public, or for the reparation of injuries done to private persons." Whether the period has arrived, in which this humane and salutary recommendation can be carried into effect, you can best judge; but the weakness of our County Goals throughout the State and the frequent escape of persons convicted for crimes, the great expence sustained by the state and county Treasuries for the apprehension of prisoners, and the yet greater expence of supporting Criminals in our County Goals, impress it upon me as a duty, to draw the attention of the legislature to the erecting of a State prison. I may here add, we have not to venture the expense upon the uncertainty of experiment, but the benefits and even profits of a public penitentiary house or state prison has [have] been abundantly proved in a number of the neighboring States.

In a just arrangement of our fiscal concerns much advantage will result to the people. While we are careful to supply the Treasury with such sums of money as the public exigencies require, it will at all times be useful to pay a strict attention to public expenditures, and to ascertain from time to time, the amount of monies drawn for the support of different branches of our government: for this purpose, the public accounts will be laid before you.

The state of our Militia has strong claims on your attention: by an official communication from the President of the United State, it has again become my duty to invite you to a consideration of this subject: this communication, together with a return of the effective force of our Militia will be laid before you. They are respectable for numbers, they are brave; they inherit the spirit of their fathers: to preserve this spirit, they must be well armed and equipped: this cannot be effected without legislative aid. Our safety and freedom essentially depend on this class of our fellow citizens. It is our highest interest, as a nation, to engraft the character of the soldier on the citizen, and to cherish that spirit, which gave us independence. It will be a sure and cheap defense.

While the horrors of war are again taking place in some of the nations of Europe, I cannot but congratulate you on the happy state of peace and tranquility that pervades the United States. A country that steadily pursues the business of Agriculture, manufactures, commerce and science and avoids war, except in defense of her just rights, is in the surest way of national prosperity and improvement. The glory derived from the increasing population and happiness of a country, is far more eligible and useful, than any thing, that can be obtained by making war, on any nation, or being distinguished by the destruction of the human race.

I shall be happy, Gentlemen, to cooperate with you in any measures that may serve to promote the interest and honor of the state: And I trust that we shall all bear in mind, that the public business will always be done to the greatest advantage, when it is done in the exercise of wisdom, of candor, and of moderation.

ISAAC TICHENOR.