

Executive Speech
of
Jonas Galusha
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SPEECH OF GOV. GALUSHA – 1811¹.

Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives, – Being elected by the independent freemen of this State, their chief magistrate for the ensuing year, with the highest sense of gratitude, I tender them my sincere thanks for so approbating my past conduct, as again to honor me with their confidence. I feel to acknowledge, as formerly on similar occasions, that the magnitude of the office and the importance of its duties are far above the sphere of my talents; and at a period so momentous as the present, I should shrink from this arduous undertaking, did I not, under the auspices of a benign Providence, confide in your wisdom, firmness and virtue, not only for support in those duties which devolve upon me, but to transact all the important duties of legislation. With these impressions, while inspired with the love of my country, and prompted by the voice of my constituents, which I ever hear with reverence, I resume the important station. When we realize the greatness of the trust reposed in us by so many thousands of our fellow citizens to direct, as their faithful representatives, the affairs of a State in which the happiness of each individual claims equal regard, and the rights of all demand the same protection and support, we shall feel it our indispensable duty to lay aside all party prejudices and suffer ourselves to be actuated by no other motives than those which coincide with individual justice and the greatest general good, and diligently pursue such measures as will be productive of public and private virtue, without which the inestimable blessings of a free government cannot long subsist.

We are, gentlemen, convened at a time by no means the least eventful, although we have heretofore suffered much by the unjust policy of the belligerent powers of Europe; yet no period since the commencement of our differences has appeared to me so portentous as the present. Great Britain seems not inclined to relinquish her offensive orders in council, surrender up our impressed seamen, or permit us to enjoy the common and legal rights of a neutral nation – but assumes the attitude of a threatening invader, although France has mitigated the rigour of her hostile measures, and so modified her Berlin and Milan decrees that they have ceased to operate against the United States. But as it is not our province to decide on the subject of peace or war, that being by the constitution of the United States confined to the general government, of which this state is a component part, and has an equal voice in her council, it is not my intention to advance any opinion on the subject, or suggest any idea which may tend to excite the passions of my fellow citizens against any foreign nations whatever; and it would much less become me, while negotiations for an adjustment are still progressing, which I pray God may terminate in an amicable settlement of all our difficulties, and that way may never be the unhappy fate of our beloved country. As the President has, for some cause, thought fit to convene Congress prior to the usual time of their convention, we may then expect to have a more extensive and perspicuous view of our national affairs. Let us, in the mean time, as far as possible, be prepared for any event which may occur. To be united is indispensably necessary to be prepared either for a state of war or for the full enjoyment of peace. The political divisions in the United States are productive of the most unhappy consequences: They not only tend to defeat every honorable attempt to terminate our differences with foreign powers by amicable treaty, but also to embolden the aggressors to persist in their unrighteous depredations on our property and add new insults to former injuries. A people well agreed in the principles of their social compact and firmly united in the support of their government, can surmount almost any obstacle which may oppose their prosperity and Independence. But when divided or torn asunder by faction, all domestic tranquility and enjoyment are at an end, and the greatest nation thus severed, may fall an easy prey to a foreign invader, or their liberties be destroyed by a domestic usurper.

Suffer me, gentlemen, on all occasions, to recommend to you in the most pressing manner, to keep in view the union of citizens and states, for on this point turns the happiness and independence of our country.

It was not my purpose, if my abilities and information would admit, to enter into a particular detailed and indication of the measures of the national administration, but only to excite you to a candid and dispassionate examination for yourselves. It will, I believe, be acknowledged by all, that the measures adopted by Congress restrictive of commerce, were intended to protect us against foreign aggressions, or cause them to be removed.

¹ Printed *Assembly Journal* of 1811, p. 19

Whether they were the best possible measures to effect those purposes or not, cannot for certainty be known, since they have been tried and others untried. But I can conceive of no measures that would have been more likely to succeed against the determined policy of the two great belligerent nations, while attended with that party opposition at home, which is manifest on all occasions. I wish not to prohibit a strict scrutiny of the conduct of the officers of government, or a careful attention to our liberties and national safety, but to prevent the dangerous evils arising from unreasonable and unfounded jealousies. Have not equal encouragements, with impartiality, been extended to both Great Britain and France, with an honest intention to procure a repeal or suitable modification of their unjust orders and decrees? And have not all political parties occasionally acknowledged and applauded the talents and virtue, the firmness and moderation of the President of the United States? Or has any one act of his life, either in his public or private capacity, manifested a design to change our government from its republican purity? What, then, should induce him, while possessed of the highest honors which his country can confer upon him, to sacrifice her dearest rights and Independence to the will of a foreign monarch? From what source then proceeds the continual charge of partiality and French influence? Have we not reason to suspect that it originates in a vehement party spirit, or a different foreign influence, operating upon some disappointed or ambitious individuals?

The confidence, gentlemen, which I have already expressed in your wisdom and integrity, supercedes the necessity of a particular detail of the business of the session. You being selected from the various parts of the state, are possessed of a knowledge of the wants and wishes of your constituents. There are some objects, however, which ought not to escape your notice. The militia, on which depends our safety in peace and our defense in war, is ever worthy of consideration. But, under the present unsettled state of our national affairs, more than ordinary attention may be requisite. The militia, if well equipped and disciplined, impelled, as they are, by motives of interest, and inspired by the love of liberty, are, I trust, sufficient to protect our rights, and repel any invasion of our territory. I consider it highly expedient, that a suitable supply of arms should be provided, either by this or the United States, for the use of our militia in cases of urgency. But whether the present state of our finances will admit of an appropriation for that purpose or not, I shall submit to your sound discretion.

The manufacturing interest received considerable encouragement at our last session; but I trust that an object so beneficial in the system of economy, and so favorable to our real independence, will be ever kept in view, and fostered by every prudent Legislature.

One of the great benefits of a system of jurisprudence is the permanency of those laws under which we enjoy our personal security and the protection of our private property. The frequent changes in our general statutes, render them perplexing to magistrates and jurors, tend to increase litigation, or promote what is by some styled "the glorious uncertainty of the law," and frequently subjects the honest citizen to expense and loss before the laws are fully promulgated, or their operation rightly understood. I should therefor recommend alterations in those cases only where experience has discovered a material defect.

I have received a resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, proposing an amendment of the constitution of the United States, which, with other communications from the executives of individual states, I shall cause seasonably to be laid before you.

That economy which has ever characterized the Legislature of Vermont, I trust will stimulate you to make all that dispatch in public business of the session of which a free and candid investigation will admit. I shall, gentlemen, readily concur with you in the adoption of such measures as may conduce to the best good of our constituents, and I ardently implore the Supreme Being, who hath all hearts in his hands, so to direct our deliberations that they may terminate in the true interest of the State and nation.

JONAS GALUSHA.