

Executive Speech
of
Martin Chittenden
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SPEECH OF GOV. MARTIN CHITTENDEN – 1814¹.

Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives, – The unsolicited approbation of my conduct the year past, considering the extreme embarrassments under which I entered upon the duties of my office, is highly gratifying, and will not fail to produce renewed exertion to promote the best interests of my fellow citizens. At the same time it affords the pleasing hope that my future services in the discharge of the duties of the office, which I have again undertaken, will be considered with the same indulgence. Without it, I should despair of discharging those duties in a satisfactory manner at this most difficult and eventful period.

The true patriot can submit to no sacrifice of truth or principle, to procure his own advancement, or promote the interests or views of a party. Men may change, and parties may change – but truth, principle and virtue are immutable. It ought, therefore, to be our firm determination to pursue the plain path of duty with steadiness and fidelity.

In declaring my undeviating attachment to the principles of our wise and excellent system of government, independently of any regard, or blind devotion, to those who may have administered it, I am sensible that high sounding professions are not the surest test of sincerity, and shall, therefore, only refer you to the general tenor of my conduct for future expectations.

Our foreign relations and defensive operations being exclusively committed to the management of the general government, excepting in particular cases, in which assistance may be required, our attention is principally confined to the local concerns of the State. And it affords me great pleasure to have it in my power to observe, that the internal quiet security and prosperity of our fellow citizens, for the year past, has been unexampled for times like the present.

Justice has been promptly, and, I believe, impartially administered, the laws duly respected, and litigation gradually diminishing – the natural and certain consequence of a well placed confidence in any upright and intelligent judiciary. Our fiscal concerns have been conducted with that fidelity and correctness which were to be expected from the acknowledged talents and integrity of the officer at the head of that department.

Our schools and seminaries of learning have not suffered that diminution and depression which might have been expected, excepting that it has been deemed advisable that the operations of one nearest the seat of war² should suffer a temporary suspension, that, at a future and more favorable period, they might be resumed, under better prospects and with increased vigor and energy.

The economy and correctness with which that liberal and humane institution, established for the security and correction of state criminals, has been conducted, affords the consoling prospect of its great usefulness to the community, evinces a general improvement in the state of society, and probably will afford some revenue to the State.

Notwithstanding the corrupting and demoralizing tendency of a state of war, our citizens have enjoyed their civil and religious privileges in an unusual degree.

The distinguished talents, integrity, and experience, of which your honorable body is composed, will render my duties less arduous, and afford a sure pledge to our constituents that their best interests will be promoted.

Man never appears in a more responsible and truly dignified station than when called to act as a representative of a free, sovereign, and independent people. We are selected from among our fellow citizens, not for the base and degrading purpose of securing our own promotion aggrandizing our particular friends, or to favor the views and interests of a party – but to consider the whole community as one common family, and like faithful guardians of their rights endeavor to promote the general welfare.

Yours is the duty, and on you, gentlemen, rests the responsibility, of selecting proper persons to fill the various offices in this State for the ensuing year – persons to whom we may safely trust the administration of justice in all its important branches, and on whom we must, in a great measure, depend for the preservation of

¹ From printed *Assembly Journal* of 1814, p. 15.

² The University of Vermont.

the peace and internal quiet of the state. It will likewise become your duty to select a suitable person to represent this State in the Senate of the United States from and after the third day of March next.

In the execution of these important duties, the most perfect confidence is entertained, that you will, unbiased by local or party considerations, be influenced by a single view to the public good.

The great importance of a well organized militia in a free state cannot escape the notice of a wise legislature. The want of precision and energy into our present military system must be apparent to every man who is conversant in military affairs, and demands a revision to adapt it to the exigencies arising from our exposed situation. It would be desirable that the burthen should be equalized, as far as is practicable, that the weight may not rest on those who are least able to bear it.

We have a right to demand from the general government full protection and security. Still it is but too evident from past experience, that much depends upon our own exertions. May not this consideration suggest the expediency of adopting some further measures for arming the militia, and providing field artillery and munitions of war, which may be applicable to sudden emergencies? We have before us the example of many of our sister states for raising a small volunteer corps, which may be relied on, in case of sudden alarm, and serve as a rallying point for other and efficient aid.

As we are authorized by the constitution to look to the general government for that protection which our exposed situation may require, it must be perfectly evident, that the militia were only designed to be called in aid of the regular force in particular cases. Those instances, which have occurred during the last year, have been met by our patriotic and brave citizens with a promptitude, spirit and zeal which are highly honorable to themselves, and which render them worthy of the gratitude of their country.

To meet the request of Gen. MACOMB, for assistance, on the late incursion of the enemy, which terminated so gloriously for the American arms, there being no portion of the militia detached or called for by the President, in conformity to the laws of the United States, it was considered that a call upon our patriotic citizens for their voluntary services was the only mode, by which efficient and timely aid could possibly be afforded.

The result has been such, as many of you, gentlemen, have witnessed. It far exceeded, in extent, our reasonable expectations. By it the enemy have been taught a useful, although mortifying lesson, that the soil of Freemen will not bear the tread of hostile feet with impunity.

At the same time it reflects the highest honor on the patriotism, spirit and valor of our fellow citizens, who, without distinction of age, character, or party, were ready to brave danger, in its most formidable appearance, for the defence of their country. And it should seem that it ought to palsy the tongue of slander – every desirable object having been secured, and in a manner the least burthensome and offensive to the feelings of a free and enlightened people.

Much is due to Gen. STRONG, and our brave volunteers; and I am requested by the Secretary of War to present them the thanks of the general government “for their prompt succor and gallant conduct in the late critical state of this frontier.”

I should do injustice to my own feelings, as well as violence to every correct principle, were I to refrain from testifying the high sense which I entertain of the brilliant achievement of Commodore MACDONOUGH, and his intrepid associates, on Lake Champlain, over a far superior naval force – an achievement which renders all encomium feeble and inadequate.

I should likewise do injustice, if I should neglect to notice the cool, persevering, and brave conduct of Brig. Gen. MACOMB, and his alike brave associates in arms, in the discomfiture of a greatly superior force of veteran troops, commanded by experienced officers.

These glorious achievements are not surpassed in the records of naval and military warfare. New lustre is added to the national character. But the effects are more immediately experienced by the northern sections of the State of Vermont and New York.

This late special interference of the Almighty in our behalf, in completely defeating the hostile designs of the enemy on our northern borders, cannot fail to render it a subject of respectful legislative notice. And although it may not be in our power to add to the laurels of those gallant commanders, and their brave associates, who, under Providence, were the authors of our protection and safety, yet we may express our gratitude to heaven, and to them, for so great a deliverance.

I have received a letter from the governor of the State of Pennsylvania, which enclosed a resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives of that State, proposing an amendment of the constitution of the United States, – by which the term of service of Senators in Congress shall be reduced from six to four years. I have received, likewise, a letter from the governor of the State of Tennessee, enclosing a resolution of the general assembly of that State proposing an amendment of the same import. These papers will be laid before you. And should any thing further of importance come to my knowledge during the present session, of which you are not possessed, it will be made the subject of a special communication.

On the subject of the war, in which our country is most unfortunately engaged, I feel disposed, at this critical period, to say as little as may be consistent with duty. But I consider it due to myself, and more especially to my constituents, explicitly to state, that the events of the war have in no wise altered my opinions of its origin, or its progress. I have conscientiously and uniformly disapproved of it, as unnecessary, unwise and hopeless, in all its offensive operations. – And notwithstanding the few brilliant successes we have met with in our operations of defence, I can see very little in its general complexion, which affords the least consolation.

Many very considerable places on our seaboard are now in the possession of the enemy. The capital of our country, that proud monument of better times, has been possessed and destroyed by him – a humiliating reflection to every real American. And I consider, that we are now suffering the evils which have, from the mistakes and misconduct of rulers, befallen this, as well as most of the nations of the earth.

It therefore becomes us to look calmly and firmly on our dangers, and meet them like men, who are mindful of what they owe to their own characters, and what they owe to their country.

It would have afforded me heartfelt satisfaction to have been able to announce to you the return of peace to an afflicted people. But our reasonable hopes, on this subject, not having been realized, and the particular spirit, with which the war appears to be prosecuted by the enemy, renders defensive measures and operations not only necessary, but righteous and just, in which we may engage with feelings most honorable and praiseworthy, and with a firm reliance on the Almighty, who has never forsaken us in the hour of peril.

I shall now, gentlemen, cheerfully proceed in the discharge of the duties of this office assigned me, – and in the prosecution of the business of the present session, you may be assured of my cordial co-operation in every measure, which has for its object the promotion of the public good.

MARTIN CHITTENDEN.