

Farewell address

of

Lee E. Emerson

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**Farewell Address**

*Members of the General Assembly:*

The four years of my administration which, incidentally, I believe should be the term of a governor, have about run their course. By custom a retiring governor on such an occasion presents to you an account of his stewardship. They have been fruitful years for our people and I wish I could recount in detail the operations of all our departments during this period, but time will not permit in the first place, neither are you interested in history except as its recitation may indicate the course for the future. A recital of certain governmental activities, however, without specific mention of others, in no way is intended to detract from the substantial accomplishments of the latter. Let me say at this time, without reservation, that all our departments of state government have zealously, efficiently and honestly carried out their statutory mandates in the public interest. In talking to you today about some of our major governmental activities, together with some observations resulting from my experiences, I hope you may be able to glean some information that will be helpful during the current session. It is in that spirit I speak to you, without in any way seeking to infringe upon the prerogative of my worthy successor in making recommendations to you and cooperatively working with you in their accomplishment.

**AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture is still basic to the economy of our state. Having spent many of my earlier years on a farm, firsthand knowledge of our farm folk has ingrained sympathy for their problems, reflecting itself in a desire to comply with their wishes whenever I could. The dairy farmer is the back bone of Vermont rural life today, and economic conditions in these areas of our state will not remain healthy unless he can get a fair price for his produce and unless, as I have reiterated before, he can be protected from disparate advantage in favor of the western grain farmer. This has been my philosophy. To implement it at the state level the 1953 session by two different acts provided for publicity funds to build up the consumption of milk. There are indications that such publicity has been successful in accomplishing its objective. We were faced with some oversupply of milk this last summer, and some receiving companies sought arbitrarily to cut off certain of their producers as a result. Sections 4636 and 4637 of the Vermont Statutes, which it was my good fortune when a member of the Senate to assist in drafting, were successfully invoked to prevent such arbitrary action, but it might be well to review these sections in the light of present day conditions in the milk industry. Our marketing laws relating to eggs, maple syrup, potatoes, and apples were likewise improved upon, but there is still work to be done in this field. A new Commissioner of Agriculture now competently carries on the important work of our Department of Agriculture, succeeding Stanley Judd, an able, conscientious public servant who died this last year in the public service.

**CONSERVATION**

1. **Fish and Game.** The accomplishments in this department have been substantial and progressive in preserving and helping to build up Vermont as a sportsman's paradise. At Bald Hill in Newark a rearing station with seven hundred fifty feet of concrete runways, home for the caretaker, cold storage building and service building with concrete dam and water system for raceways has been constructed. A new cold storage plant and grinding room were added at Salisbury this year. At Bennington a new artesian well flowing 168 gallons per minute has been developed as well as the installation at the hatchery of a new heating and lighting system. A storage and service building has been added at Milton. In the Addison County area a manager's home and service building have been constructed, three impoundments completed, the last one being the Richville Dam in Shoreham, the dedication of which I attended last month. A fourth is in the process of being built. Finally, let me say these projects aimed at preserving and building up the fish, game and bird life of the state could not be made efficiently operative without adequate and contented personnel. To accomplish this latter objective, the warden service has been improved upon through the appointment of two district supervisors, additional personnel, and more adequate pay. Today as one result more fish are being stocked than ever before in the history of the state.

2. **Forestry.** I take pride in the Municipal Forest Act of 1951. Many towns and cities are setting up municipal forests today. I hope the trend continues until every town and city in the state has such a project. The 1953 Session wisely provided for the St. Catherine Beach Development. It was badly needed in that section of the state. We have steadily improved our access roads into state forest and park areas and likewise we have steadily gone forward with the acquisition of other areas for the same purposes in strategic sections of the state or they have been given to us by interested citizens. Jay Peak has been acquired in the north. At Silver Lake in Barnard through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. John McDill and others, we now own a very essential park area there. Parking areas at ski resorts have likewise been enlarged upon to meet the rapidly growing need for expanded ski facilities. Conformable with our duty to the past in preserving for posterity historic sites, the Chester A. Arthur home in Fairfield and the Wilder House at Plymouth have been restored. The richness of Vermont's traditions should always be preserved.

### **DEFENSE**

The 1951 Session, at my request, authorized the setting up of a State Guard with a \$50,000 appropriation. We did not use it, because with the able cooperation of our Adjutant General, who at this time I want to personally commend for long and able public service for the state, we were able to procure the allocation of additional National Guard units from Washington to take the place of those activated into the Federal Service in the 43d Division at the time of the Korean conflict. Our National Guard has always been an honor and a credit to the state. Today I am happy to report it has been restored to a strength of almost 2600 members. In competition with other State National Guard units which I have observed, let me say it does not have to take a back seat to any of them. Its needs should be sympathetically considered. Likewise, we have set up a Civil Defense program for the state. Until the uncertainty of world conditions can be resolved in favor of a more peaceful atmosphere we must not by indifference or neglect let down our guard in this important field.

I am happy also to report that the Soldier's Bonus recommended by me for the Veterans of the Korean conflict has been paid in the sum of approximately \$1,000,000 from surplus funds.

### **EDUCATION**

There are many who rate the achievements of the 1953 Session in the field of education as the greatest in the history of the state. Comparisons are odious, but in all modesty it may be said those achievements were substantial. Among other accomplishments, the minimum pay of teachers was raised, State aid to the towns was increased and was badly needed; for the first time the state embarked on a program of aid to the communities on a matching basis in the field of schoolhouse construction. Already the impetus of this latter program is being felt in stimulating badly needed schoolhouse construction at the local level. Again, the Legislature of 1953 by No. 258 of the Acts of 1953, gave recognition to the principle I contended for at that time, that under conditions then existing scholarships should be made equally available to any Vermont boy or girl desiring to attend any Vermont institution of higher learning. I do not elaborate further on this important subject, because you will be hearing more about it.

### **FINANCES**

At the end of the first fiscal year occurring during my administration, namely June 30, 1951, the state surplus stood at the sum of \$640,000. On June 30, 1955, it will approximate one million dollars. I recommended no new General Fund taxes to the 1951 Session; neither would any have been necessary had certain drastic economies I proposed at that time been adopted. Since they were not and appropriations made above my budget recommendations, new taxes had to be found. The 15 per cent surtax was resorted to. Furthermore, declarations and withholdings were put into effect, the impact of which could not be accurately gauged at the time. As a result and because of economical administration and inflationary conditions the greatest surplus in our history was accumulated. The prudence with which the 1953 Session disposed of it bespeaks the wisdom of not having called a Special Session to refund it. Its existence obviated any possible necessity of new taxes having to be voted by the 1953 Session. To the extent that Session may have increased burdens through the addition of new services or the stepping up of old ones, it is always the prerogative of a subsequent legislature, in the light of presently existing economic conditions, to modify or reappraise in the light of what it believes the best current interest to be. By the 1951 Session, at my request, setting up the Code

Classification of payments permitting more careful scrutiny of departmental expenditures, by restrictions on out-of-state travel, by careful scrutiny of the taking on of additional personnel except where absolutely essential and in many other ways, we have earnestly sought to see that the taxpayer got the maximum value for his money.

## **HEALTH**

On December 3, 1953, after a period of controversy as to its location and what it should contain, an open house was held in the new Health Department building in Burlington. It was my personal pleasure to attend the opening ceremonies of that beautiful building. Construction had been started December 7, 1951, and almost two years later to the day, the various offices of the Department had been brought together under one roof where, up to that time, various units of the Department had been scattered over the Burlington area. This aided greatly in permitting the assembling of the various elements of the Department in one place, thereby helping to raise employee morale, and so promoting increased efficiency and cooperation among the divisions of the Department.

Three new functions have been assumed by the Department in the last four years that have, and will make, a continued contribution to the State. A Division of Public Health Statistics, headed by a public health trained statistician has been inaugurated, a medical director has been secured for the Division of Cancer Control and the Public Health Service has sent a person to direct the health education activities of the Department.

In July of 1951, the public health nursing program was re-adapted to a generalized nursing service which now gives nursing coverage to all areas of the State. In the spring of this year, an important step was taken in the hopeful eradication of dread poliomyelitis, when the Department cooperated with the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis polio vaccination field trial in Chittenden County, in which second grade school children were offered the Salk vaccine and first and third graders participated as control groups. The results of the field trial will not be known until later this year (1955), but all of us are hopeful that an immunizing agent will be found in the Salk vaccine or some other vaccine.

The Hospital Services Division has been charged with and has developed standards of nursing homes and hospital licensure. This is particularly important as we face every day an expanding older age group of our State's population.

## **HIGHWAYS**

Highway progress during my two terms in office has been very gratifying. Eighty-seven miles of gravel gaps on the State System have been hard surfaced during that time, closing the last gap on seven important State routes. On November 19, 1954, the contract was let to construct the second and last section of highway between Bethel and Woodstock, which will wipe out the last gravel gap on the Federal Aid Primary System. With the completion of this program in sight, we have already embarked on a long-range plan to widen, straighten, and strengthen our main highways. Such projects have already been completed in Pownal, Mendon, Mount Holly, Proctorsville, Bradford, and are under construction in Dummerston, Putney and Barton. With the completion of bond-financed bridges in Alburg-North Hero, North Hero-Grand Isle, St. Johnsbury, Readsboro, Berkshire, and three in Montgomery, all our paved State highways have bridges capable of carrying the full statutory vehicle weight, making use of short and convenient truck routes in four locations.

The General Assembly of 1953 passed important legislation to speed up the State Aid Blacktopping Program. State Aid Highways are now being built in larger and more economical projects, and an overall plan to complete all such highways which carry a daily traffic of 150 vehicles has been prepared. While the surfacing of 134 miles of State Aid Highway miles was undertaken during my first term, 155 miles were provided for during my second, 117 miles of which is now surfaced, 38 miles still under construction. Thirty-two villages have already been provided with hard-surfaced outlet by this construction, and 6 additional will be so provided when the construction is completed. Town Highways not only received increased appropriations for the current biennium, but, most important of all, are being better administered by the local officials responsible for their improvement. Both the quantity and quality of work done with State appropriated funds has improved. We are making good progress on our objective of having a year-around highway to every farm and home in Vermont.

While we have been constructing new roads we have not been neglecting the old ones. It is significant that the General Assembly has never adopted the penny-wise-pound-foolish policy of cutting maintenance appropriations, but has always provided the necessary funds to keep all our highways in condition where we get full benefit and enjoyment out of our investment. The State has received many compliments from visitors on the condition of our highways.

Good as all this progress is, I consider an important achievement of my four years in guiding the highway program to be the building up of a strong and capable Highway Department. In 1951 the engineering section of the Highway Department was at 62 per cent of strength and losing engineers each month. Adequate salaries were the obvious answer. They were provided. In 1952 we gained 22 engineers. We have gained 40 more since and are now at 83 per cent of full strength. Whereas on June 30, 1952, the Department failed by one full project of spending the funds appropriated for that fiscal year, on December 14, 1954, it let the contract for the last of the funds appropriated for the present fiscal year and, today, has plans for next year's work 30 per cent completed, with one project all ready to advertise for bids as soon as State matching funds are appropriated.

So, I can leave you a highway system well suited to today's needs, a progressive program fully under way, no funding obligations to hamper the choice of future methods of finance, and a Highway Department prepared to carry out whatever program this General Assembly entrusts to it.

### **INSTITUTIONS**

We have continued to make steady progress in additions and improvements where necessary to our physical plants at the various state institutions to care adequately for those there who are our responsibilities. Both the 1951 and 1953 Legislatures did nobly in this respect and the list of projects for repair, renovation, and construction is a long and impressive one. Likewise, the putting into effect of a revised and improved pay scale has stemmed the rapid turnover of institutional help that was being experienced. Vermont legislatures, where the need has been clearly shown, have always met that need for our institutional inmates and I feel confident they will continue so to do. Briefly, as indicative on this point, appropriations provided have permitted staff additions in the various institutions, which afford better patient care of the tubercular and mentally ill and more adequate supervision in the correctional institutions. A clinical psychologist, female social worker, and home attendants were added at Brandon. Nurses, an occupational therapist, and a medical social worker were added at the Vermont Sanatorium. An athletic director at the Weeks School; psychiatric services were made available at the Women's Reformatory.

One of the most tragic of occurrences took place in 1952 at one of our state institutions. That was the escape of Demag and Blair from the State Prison. I made a personal investigation of the circumstances attending escape and capture, administered disciplinary action, and made recommendations for tighter security that have been carried out. The last related to the setting up of a committee to look into the need for a new prison. That report will be before you at the Session. Punishment in the case of these two has now been completely administered.

The transfer to the Department of Institutions from the Health Department supervision of Vermont Sanatorium, Washington County Sanatorium, Brattleboro Retreat, Vermont State Hospital, and Brandon State School has worked out well.

### **LABOR AND INDUSTRY**

The occupational disease law was adopted on my recommendation by the 1951 Session. Experience will show some changes and improvements are indicated. The relations of this administration with both labor organizations in the state have been cordial and friendly. The procurement of more industries and therefore more jobs we have sought assiduously but it is at best a difficult task in a highly competitive field. Our Development Commission, now under able leadership, working cooperatively with private agencies, I am sure will uphold the state's responsibility as declared by Statute to aid and assist in such procurement. The Development Credit Corporation, provided on recommendation to the 1953 Legislature, has now got over the initial hurdle of procuring subscriptions to its goal of \$50,000 capital stock and it should develop into a power for good in the future economic life of the State.

## **POWER**

My entry into the governorship followed a spasmodic period of power shortages disruptive to the economy of certain sections of the state. To the question of what should be done, I addressed myself on many occasions. At least two of the suggestions made have been implemented by legislation. One had to do with the Public Service Commission having authority to order the integration of the power systems of the state by means of high power transmission lines so that if there was a lack of power in one section it could be made available from another where the supply was adequate. The utilities viewed the adoption of this recommendation with some trepidation, but they went along with it. Fortunately, the power thus vested in the Commission has not had to be exercised. The power companies have seen the need and have been doing a good job in making steady progress in working out such interconnections. The construction of the new 66,000 volt line by the Central Vermont Public Service Company on the west side of the State joining its old with newly acquired properties in Franklin County is illustrative. The second had to do with designating the Public Service Commission the bargaining agency of the State for the procurement of power from sources outside the state. This was provided for by No. 193 of the Acts of 1951. Manifestly this latter was aimed at the procurement of power from the International Rapids Section of the St. Lawrence River. Three possibilities, as I see it, exist for the procurement of this power; namely, (1) by displaced power over the transmission lines of Canadian companies into northern Vermont, (2) by transmission lines coming into the southern section of the State, and (3) by construction under some form of state control, supervision or sponsorship of high power transmission lines from points at or near the source into some system or load center in the State. Although a rosy picture has been painted of what St. Lawrence power would do for Vermont, the acid test so far as state-contemplated activity is concerned, assuming the allocation of an amount to us we could use efficiently, would be whether the costs entailed in procurement are disproportionate to the benefits to be received. On this point you should be fully informed. We should welcome the procurement of such power provided it can be obtained by some practicable method at reasonable cost.

Four years ago when I took office we were faced with the mere possibility of St. Lawrence power. Today the project has been authorized and is being built. To date we have not lost or overlooked any opportunity for the procurement of this power. The Public Service Commission, acting on my instructions, has kept constantly in touch with what has been going on. If you desire to take different or more positive action, the opportunity is present so to do.

## **SOCIAL WELFARE**

During the last four years the Department of Social Welfare has rendered prompt and effective service to all applicants for Old Age and other types of assistance. With few exceptions a decision has been rendered within 60 days and a check mailed to those found eligible. Pending cases each month have been less than the number of new applications. In this period the average monthly payment for Old-Age Assistance has increased from \$40.09 to \$44.74, in Aid to Dependent Children from \$53.98 per family to \$77.73, in Aid to the Blind from \$44.80 to \$48.60 and in Aid to the Disabled from \$42.75 to \$48.38. These payments are reasonably comparable to the national average and to those paid in our neighboring states of Maine and New Hampshire, excluding medical care and hospitalization.

The adoptive program of the department has been extended and strengthened and the long-time reputation for low administrative expense has been maintained. In our largest program of the Agency, Old-Age Assistance, 96.6 cents out of each assistance dollar has been paid to recipients.

The Department of Social Welfare has had the benefit of a large number of experienced and loyal employees with long tenure of office. These have contributed greatly to the good reputation of the agency and its good public relations in a difficult field of public service.

## **CONCLUSION**

Today as my administration comes to an end there closes with it the most lush period in state income ever experienced. Perhaps it might likewise be prophetic to say we are approaching the close of an era in our national economy. The false prosperity we have heretofore experienced because of war, with its attendant inflationary trends, is slowly being replaced by one based on peace. The dislocations caused by the transition

have their reverberations here in Vermont. Unemployment is at a higher level in some areas. Then again, many of the markets of the world are closed to us because of current national policy or trade barriers. We are rapidly becoming our sole best customer. This great industrial giant we have here in the United States can far outproduce what we need for our own domestic consumption and the principal reason why in the past we have kept employment at a high level has been our ability and opportunity to export our excess production. We do not want to have to resort to war to bolster our economy, but to scale down national production to national consumption bodes no good for the future of it in terms of jobs and prosperity. Neither is prosperity to be found in the taxpayer's pocketbook as a long-term method of building up job opportunity, although such an approach is sometimes justified to alleviate depression.

Today we stand alone as the only effective power to withstand the aggression of Communism. The ascendancy of the United States to this position of prime defender of the democratic way of life entails greater military expenditures to guarantee its perpetuation. By the same token, it is logical to assume that as a free people burden themselves with ever greater and necessary military expenditure, if the tax load remains constant, the amount that can be spent for the domestic economy becomes proportionately smaller. If broad activity on the domestic front is to be stepped up at the same time it can only be through resort to deficit financing or new taxes. This national condition reaches down to the level of state government. It places on you today as well as other state legislatures throughout the land the great responsibility of gauging to some degree how much you want to add under the circumstances to the national burden to support the domestic economy by appeals to it for further aid. It provokes soul-searching in the realm of understanding what we at the state level want to do for ourselves and what objectives we shall turn to government to accomplish.

The degree of forbearance, therefore, in these abnormal times, which the citizen is willing to exercise in what he asks of his government determines the extent to which America shall remain a land of freedom and opportunity. Economics and government today are closely interwoven, but the specific role of government still remains constant; namely, to aid and assist in the maintenance of a sound economy, never to control and run the show itself. Unwise governmental fiscal policies based upon the opposite approach are apt to promote a desire for escape from them in the individual or to dull the creative impulse.

My philosophy at the beginning of my administration was to keep bureaucracy out of the life of the citizen and let him do for himself as much as possible. Four years in this high position as governor which the people have bestowed upon me lead me to conclude that it is still a good philosophy today, especially in view of present national and world conditions I have mentioned. To the extent you find it appealing, I hope you will bear it in mind in the deliberations upon which you are about to embark. There will be modifications and departures from it, but to know and understand the principle permits of dealing constructively with the problem when the general has to be weighed against the specific.

To the many public-spirited men and women who have served on request on boards and commissions, many times without pay or at best with only meager stipend, I express my thanks. I leave state service with an able group of administrators heading up the various departments. I thank them for their cooperative and conscientious performance of duty and bespeak from them that same loyal assistance to my successor. Your state government is in good hands in the person of my successor. May you and he cooperatively build together during this session for a better Vermont in the true Vermont tradition.

LEE E. EMERSON.

### **Dissolution**

The Governor, having concluded the reading of his retiring message was escorted to the Executive Chamber by the committee appointed by the Chair.

The Joint Assembly dissolved.

HOWARD E. ARMSTRONG,  
*Secretary of State, Clerk*