

Inaugural address

of

Madeleine M. Kunin

As it appears in the

Journal

of the

JOINT ASSEMBLY

BIENNIAL SESSION

1989

Thursday, January 5, 1989 Inaugural Address

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, Constitutional Officers, Governors, Honorable Members of the General Assembly, fellow citizens of the Great State of Vermont:

It is a high honor to be sworn into office to serve you -- the people of the State Vermont-- for a historic third term.

It's a great pleasure to be joined by my husband and children, and other members of my family and friends, who add a special dimension to this day. Its official importance is apparent: we are inaugurating both a new term and a new agenda for the State of Vermont.

But this day is also significant on a personal level. As I have repeated the words of the Oath of Office, taking it for the third time, let me assure you that the art of governing the State of Vermont is never done by rote.

Yes, I am strengthened by our achievements in the last four years, and I know, more clearly than I did the first time I raised my right hand what lies ahead. I also understand enough about the demands of this office to know that each day is an adventure, with new problems requiring fresh solutions.

Quite simply, I look forward to this biennium with anticipation and enthusiasm.

Today is the day we begin to define who we are and what we hope to achieve in the next two years.

MAKING CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

As we begin to look ahead to Bicentennial year 1991, we find ourselves poised between two centuries -- about to leave the 20th -- one that we know, to enter the 21st, one that tests our powers of imagination.

1989 is not too soon to begin to prepare ourselves and our children for life in the next century; to assure ourselves that we are addressing the right questions in the most effective manner.

What kind of a state do we want to become in the next century, and how do we assure that our vision is realized?

It is precisely the ability to accurately envision the future that prompted Vermont to request statehood in 1791. This rough wilderness, wedged between New York and New Hampshire, faced a choice: Join the Union or continue to stand alone.

Join it did, and thereby achieved both military and political security. As a result, Vermont's population grew from 85,000 in 1791 to 154,000 in 1800--a short space of nine years.

Today, we require similar talents -- the ability to foresee change and adapt to it, so that Vermont will continue to be strong and evoke pride in its people.

History is a fine teacher, and we can learn much about ourselves as we explore our colorful past, an adventure I encourage all Vermonters to share as we prepare to celebrate our Bicentennial year in 1991.

Geography is also a teacher. We often learn about who we are, when we travel to other countries and are asked to explain ourselves and our form of government.

During our recent visit to the Soviet Union to establish a sister state, I thought about the very nature of our democratic system and why it has survived for 200 years.

FUNDAMENTALS OF DEMOCRACY

"We are not very experienced in democracy," our Soviet hosts told us.

I asked myself, what in our experience as Vermonters and Americans has enabled us to uphold democracy for 200 years?

I concluded that strict adherence to some fundamental principles protected us from abuses of power:

1. A respect for the rule of law.
2. A government which administers the law in a responsive and fair manner.
3. A value system which is compassionate and respects the rights of the individual.

Our respect for the rule of law is reaffirmed here today, as the three branches of government -- Executive, Legislative and Judicial -- gather under our golden dome. On this day, by our joint presence here, we recommit ourselves to the sanctity of our Constitutional form of government.

This structure has provided equal protection, as well as equal opportunity, for all Vermonters. The tension between the branches -- known to every schoolchild as "checks and balances" has been the public's safeguard, allowing not only for rule by the majority, but also protection for the minority.

In contrast to an authoritarian form of government, we constantly make certain that government exists to serve the people, rather than having the people serve the government. That concept, too, was expressed to me as a new idea in the Soviet Union.

As I compared their system to ours -- as it was, as it is today, and as it hopes to become -- I concluded that above all, our form of government is distinguished by a basic respect for the dignity and worth of the individual and a belief in the perfectibility of all human beings.

VERMONT RECOGNIZES GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE IN 21ST CENTURY

As we enter the next century, it will become increasingly important to reaffirm our democratic values, to express our humanity, and to recognize our interdependence on this planet.

Vermont's 18th and 19th century isolation has ended, and we have become a part -- an inseparable, vulnerable part -- of the larger world. Increasingly, we find Vermont's triumphs and Vermont's problems linked with those of people around the globe.

Vermont alone cannot cure the problem of acid rain, nor can it eradicate the scourge of homelessness by itself. But we can join hands with others across our nation and around the world who are working to do so.

Just as Vermont made the decision to link its destiny with the United States in 1791 when it joined the Union, today Vermont must make a parallel decision to link our destiny with the world; we must be full participants in the new political, economic and environmental structures which are developing.

Two hundred years ago the threats to our existence were easily identifiable -- Yorkers to the west and New Hampshireites to the east. Today's dangers are more elusive, but no less lethal. If we are to plan for life in the next century, we must meet them head on.

The greatest threats to life in the 21st century are twofold: nuclear war, and environmental destruction, either of which would make our planet uninhabitable.

It will require both political will and moral force to achieve global agreement that the possibility of nuclear war is obsolete and that continued environmental degradation is intolerable.

All of our plans for the next century will be irrelevant if we do not succeed in structuring government policies which reflect these life-sustaining, rather than life-destroying, values.

There are signs of change. Let us hope that Mikhail Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations, promising a diversion of resources from military to domestic purposes, will be remembered as the day the Cold War came to an end.

A new spirit of optimism has surfaced, and fragile as it is, we must work to support it. A lower level of hostility and a higher level of trust will also allow our new President to pay greater attention to our domestic

needs by limiting the growth in our military budget. Only by shifting our priorities can our nation and our state fully act upon the humanitarian values upon which our democracy is based.

We know the price Vermont has paid to support our military budget; we have had to increase our expenditure for domestic programs by \$58 million in the last four years to compensate for federal cutbacks.

Despite our generosity, too many Vermont children experience poverty, too many elderly Vermonters face insecurity, too many of our families find housing and health care are beyond their reach, and too many of our high school graduates discover they can't afford a college education.

It's essential that the federal government not abdicate these responsibilities. We must redirect our nation's resources to address these critical domestic needs.

If the new dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union contributes to this shift, the small State of Vermont can be proud that we have played a useful role in establishing international ties through individuals involved in Project Harmony, Bridges for Peace, the Sister City of Yaroslavl, and most recently, our mission to establish a sister state relationship with the autonomous Republic of Karelia.

The second threat to our existence is environmental destruction.

One example of national and international cooperation is our agreement for the protection of Lake Champlain. The memorandum of understanding for our lake can become a model for protecting other resources.

It is critical that such international agreements are forged to mitigate global environmental problems. Equally important, is the adoption of a universal environmental ethic which will equate devastation of the environment with the destruction of life itself.

Here also, Vermonters have taken the lead, enacting some of the toughest environmental laws in the country. But now, we must take our case into a larger arena and demand prompt national and international action.

Vermont will have an opportunity to be heard through the National Governors' Association, where I will chair the Committee on Energy and the Environment. We will co-sponsor an international conference in February on the critical subject of global warming.

Meanwhile, there is important work to be done here in Vermont.

GETTING TOUGH ON DWI AND DRUG ABUSE

I ask you to join me in an all-out effort to reduce the tragic highway deaths due to alcohol and drug abuse.

One evening this fall, returning home on Route 7, we were passed by a speeding convertible. Five minutes later, we saw a burning wreck; the driver was dead, other passengers seriously injured.

It all seemed senseless and preventable. Many Vermonters share the strong belief that we must get tougher on drunk drivers and reduce these tragedies.

I will ask you to:

- . . enact a seat belt law
- . . suspend a driver's license on the spot for DWI or failure to submit to a DWI test
- . . increase penalties for DWI and drug offenses
- . . enact a felony charge for repeat DWI offenders
- . . purchase new infrared DWI testing equipment and add 10 state troopers to crack down on DWI and drug offenders, and
- . . take steps to rigorously enforce truck safety.

The evidence suggests that no single step can have a greater impact on saving lives and reducing injuries than the passage of a seat belt law. A recent study on seat belt usage in the Journal of the American Medical

Association concludes that only 6.8 percent of seat belt wearers required hospitalization after a motor vehicle accident, compared to 19.2 percent not wearing seat belts.

Use of seat belts significantly cuts health care costs; people wearing seat belts incurred bills of \$534, compared to \$1583 for those without seat belts.

It is society, not only the individual, that pays the price for these needless deaths and injuries. It's time for Vermont to join the 31 states who have seat belt laws.

STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY

As we move towards the 21st century, we must plan ahead to maintain our excellent economy and record low unemployment rate. To achieve those goals, I will ask you to make these investments:

- . . approve a \$45 million package to fund a "Bridge 2000" program, provide more aid to towns, and restore the balance in the Transportation Fund
- . . enact legislation to make more affordable housing available
- . . pursue expanded trade with Canada
- . . simplify the current use tax program
- . . support family leave legislation
- . . enhance child care services
- . . ensure health care quality, cost control, and provide increased health insurance coverage, and
- . . improve child support collections.

TIME TO ASSESS EDUCATION

Let us turn to education, the key to the long-term vitality of the Vermont economy. The time for assessment is here. Therefore, I will ask you to:

- . . support a system of accountability and evaluation of all schools, and support grants for innovative school leadership programs.

THE ENVIRONMENT: CONSTANT VIGILANCE

The protection of the environment needs our constant vigilance. The passage of laws is not enough. We must take further steps to:

- . . improve enforcement, risk assessment, and management within the Agency of Natural Resources
- . . improve the administration of our water quality laws
- . . fully implement Act 200, and
- . . enact a siting law to dispose of Vermont's low level nuclear wastes.

RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE BUREAUCRACY

In addition to the economy, education, and the environment, I ask you to focus on a fourth category -- efficiency. We have never singled it out, assuming efficiency was incorporated into other programs. But after four years of new legislative initiatives, it is time to put the spotlight on improving the process of governing itself.

As I observed at the outset, one test of a democracy is the relevance and responsiveness of its government.

We must assure that our existing laws are working and that government services are delivered efficiently.

This task will demand as much creativity and attentiveness as starting new programs; it is imperative that we improve the productivity of government services to meet increased demands.

We have an excellent framework upon which to build -- a seasoned administration ready to join you in this undertaking, and dedicated Vermont state employees.

Therefore, I will propose:

- . . a private sector management review team to recommend efficiencies in state government
- . . a senior executive corps to better utilize our top managers, and
- . . further investments in automation.

TRADE WITH OUR CANADIAN NEIGHBORS

Now, I would like to focus on the economy. As we envision new centers of economic activity in the next century, increasingly, we will look northward to our Canadian neighbors for markets and as trading partners. To build on the spirit of the trade agreement between our nations, I will appoint a six-member Vermont Commission to work with our Quebec counterparts to establish stronger educational, cultural, and economic ties with the Province of Quebec and all of Canada.

Trade with Canada is not new to Vermont. In 1784, the General Assembly recommended the adoption of measures “. . . for opening a free trade and commerce with the Province of Quebec upon terms of reciprocity.”

More than 200 years later, we are fulfilling that legislative intent.

HEALTH CARE: QUALITY, AVAILABILITY, COST

Today, at this particular juncture in our history, an issue which has far-reaching economic and social impact for Vermonters is the quality, availability and cost of health care.

The problem of providing health insurance for the 31,000 Vermonters who are uninsured needs to be addressed, and I remain firmly committed to reaching that goal. But this objective cannot be isolated from the fact that our existing healthcare system is out of control, its costs rising at a rate of three and four times the rate of inflation.

These costs are hemorrhaging the state budget. It is essential that we develop a strategy to assure quality and contain health care costs before we expand health insurance coverage.

There is a sense of urgency to this mission because, as scarce state dollars are drained off by high health care bills, we lose the ability to invest in innovation and prevention.

Today, 73 percent of Vermont employers provide health insurance coverage for some of their employees. It is essential that all employers contribute a fair and affordable share of health insurance costs and the federal government has to be a partner.

I remain confident that we can develop a system which provides quality care at a price we can afford.

I ask for your patience and for your participation, so that we can develop a system which works and which may be a model for the nation.

To achieve that goal, I will take two steps:

. . One, appoint Hamilton Davis to be my special counsel for health care, and charge him with the development of a quality assurance system that for the first time will distinguish appropriate from inappropriate care. It is estimated that a 20-40 percent reduction in costly inappropriate health care services may result

I am grateful to the Hospital Data Council, the Vermont State Medical Society, the Vermont Coalition for Health, and the Vermont Hospital Association for beginning a private-public partnership to achieve this goal.

This system should be in place a year from now. If it does not result in significant changes, other immediate cost containment steps will be taken.

Mr. Davis will also review problems in related areas — including Medicaid, nursing home reimbursement, and the Certificate of Need process.

. . The second step will be a series of modest but important initiatives to expand health care coverage for the uninsured:

- * require that all insurance policies cover maternity care
- * limit insurers' ability to exclude individuals from employer group policies
- * fund a one-year technical assistance program to make it easier for small businesses to implement insurance benefits
- *implement a college student health insurance requirement
- * require employers to report the amount and cost of health care benefits they provide, so a useful base of information can be established, and
- * continue to fund the Vermont Health Insurance Plan Board.

This is a first step toward our eventual goal of assuring that all Vermonters have health insurance.

Next year, if sufficient progress is made on a quality assurance system, and if the private sector makes a solid commitment to help solve the problem of the uninsured, I will propose extending health insurance for prenatal care and for children.

If we move forward, one step at a time, I am confident we will achieve our goal.

WORKING FAMILIES

In the year 2000, the two-wage-earner family will be a growing trend. Two-thirds of the new entrants into the labor force will be women, making it essential to meet the needs of working families.

Therefore, I ask you to enact a family leave law to give these families the opportunity to combine their roles as breadwinners and responsible parents.

QUALITY EDUCATION

Let us turn to education. Vermonters have shown unprecedented support for public education, increasing state aid by 84 percent in four years, providing kindergarten for all children, and starting a program for three- and four-year olds at risk. That emphasis on education was well placed.

Now it is time to concentrate on quality. We have made an assumption that if school districts have a sufficient amount of money to spend, consistent educational quality will result.

It is essential that we test that assumption. That is why I strongly endorse a system of accountability, as proposed by Commissioner Mills and the State Board of Education; one that focuses on math and writing skills.

We are not the first generation of Vermonters to make these requests. In Samuel Williams' 1794 HISTORY OF VERMONT, he wrote that parents wanted their children "acquainted with the rules of arithmetic, so far as shall be necessary to carry on any of the most common and necessary occupations of life. Nothing would be more dishonorable to the parents or to the children, than to be without it (education)."

To keep us from dishonor, even today, we must make strong demands on our educational system, our children, and parents to assure that the "necessary occupations of life" may still be carried out.

Just as Vermonters recognized 200 years ago, we again acknowledge the powerful link between educational excellence and economic well-being. On a global scale, we know that those nations which produce the most highly educated workforce will out-produce the rest.

And we must look beyond high school. Our institutions of higher education, both public and private, are one of our valuable Vermont resources.

In preparation for the year 2000, when post-secondary education will become increasingly essential, I recommend a review of Vermont's higher education.

IMPLEMENTING ACT 200

Last year at this time, I focused on a single subject -- managing growth. The result was Act 200. My belief in this law's importance has strengthened as Vermont continues to experience extraordinary growth and change. Our task now is to make the law work, both within state government and at the community level, by encouraging our citizens to become enthusiastically involved in its implementation.

Too often in the past, state government has made decisions which have either ignored local priorities, or which have been in conflict with other agencies. This era should come to a close with the successful implementation of Act 200.

As Act 200 gains in stature, the regulatory aspect of Act 250 will diminish. Towns and regions with approved plans will be able to shoulder many of the decisions now assumed at the state level through Act 250.

Some problems remain to be addressed, and the most critical of these is the loss of farmland.

Through our well-intentioned desire to help our farmers, we have created overlapping and sometimes confusing programs. I ask your help to create greater simplicity and clarity in this area.

We must continue to seek ways to keep our farmers working the land. There is no single solution; and there is no cheap solution. Necessity and prudence demand that we evaluate what we do, and that we continue a diverse strategy, including the current use tax, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund, improved marketing, and programs provided through the University of Vermont.

With the implementation of Act 200, we have another tool at our disposal: planning. Vermont is once again in the vanguard of growth management.

I strongly urge you to resist changing Act 200; give it a chance to work.

I know no other way to shape the future than to think about what it might be like, and then to try to make our best vision of that future happen. That is the basis of planning.

In a democratic society, some have resisted planning, fearing that it might inhibit our spontaneity, our entrepreneurial spirit, and our very freedom.

We all feared the heavy hand of bureaucracy needed to make it function.

Some of these fears are well-founded, since we know that societies which are highly planned are often paternalistic, and have a tendency to become overbearing, dull, and unresponsive to the public.

Worst of all, they can stifle economic and intellectual vitality.

Our challenge in Vermont is to make planning a grassroots democratic process, reflective of the diverse and sometimes contradictory interests in our communities. To succeed we must plan without curtailing individuality and entrepreneurship.

I believe we can do it. This small State of Vermont can be a model of how to plan for the future, of how to help steer ourselves into the next century by making the right choices on transportation, education and the environment -- here, within our borders.

VERMONT IN THE YEAR 2000

Further, we can be a model state by acknowledging that our destiny is intertwined with others on this globe, dependent on decisions made far beyond our boundaries. And we can help shape these decisions as well, by continuing to make our voices heard on the issues of arms reductions, environmental agreements, and the emerging world economic system.

What will Vermont be like in the year 2000?

On this Inauguration Day, as we dream about the future, we feel confident that we have the capacity, the courage, the tools and the imagination to shape the future.

Our respect for human dignity, our allegiance to the rule of law, and our commitment to a fair government will help us to guarantee that Vermont will retain the qualities we admire most -- our fierce defense of the environment and aggressive determination to achieve greater economic opportunities for all of our citizens.

Now, it is time to get to work, as you inaugurate this 60th biennial session of the Vermont General Assembly. I look forward to sharing this adventure with you. Let us begin.