

Inaugural Address
of
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Address Thursday, January 6, 1977

Inaugural

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the General Assembly.

Although I know that I am no longer entitled to points of personal privilege in this body, I should like to ask your indulgence that I might say a personal word before I begin the more traditional comments expected of me this day.

I do want to say how glad I am to see so many Former Governors and their First Ladies here today. I want to say that I miss, and I am sure that you all do, the presence of Deane and Marjory Davis. I know that you all pray, as I do, that they will be back among us shortly and in good health. I want particularly to tell you how good it is to be back in this Hall among so many treasured friends. Remembering how moved I was by your generosity to me on the occasion when I said good bye to you last year uncertain then if I would ever have a future opportunity to work with you. So it is a particular joy to have the pleasure to be back here again. I do want to tell you before I start that I understand in our common cause we must now proceed down different roads. I hope that you will be permitting me to continue to think of you as my personal friends as well as my colleagues without fearing that I will obscure the important separation between the branches. Above all, I want you to know how much I respect the legislative process. We are sure to disagree from time to time but when we do, I will always know that your sense of responsibility, your thoughtfulness will be no less than mine, only different. What you have taught me in this Chamber cannot be un-learned. I told you as I said good bye that there are other offices in the State of Vermont other than Legislator, but to me, there is none higher. I also want to take this occasion to express my appreciation and, I believe that of Vermont, to Governor Thomas Salmon. What he has done for me and you, I believe, this last nine weeks in making it possible for me to start early studying that which needed to be studied in preparation with his staff. I am sure that other Governors have assisted those who were going to take their place, but although I have known Tom for many years and liked him we could not call each other personal friends and we were of different parties but he spared absolutely nothing to give me the best opportunity to start this work, this day. I think that that deserves to become the tradition and I pledge to you that I will do no less for those who follow me.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, Distinguished Former Governors and their First Ladies, Members of the Judiciary, Distinguished Guests and Members of the General Assembly.

On this occasion, one hundred years, three months, and one day ago, Governor Horace Fairbanks said about Vermonters—"In the memorable year of 1777 . . . though claimed on the east by New Hampshire,—claimed and menaced on the west by New York,—oppressed and warred against on the north by Great Britain,—unrecognized and unsupported by the sister colonies, they, a mere handful of sturdy yeomen, stood manfully and independently for the right. May the same infinite wisdom guide *us* in all legislative deliberations . . ."

"Standing on the dividing line of the centuries, it is the part of wisdom to consider not alone the present, its comforts and privileges, but as well the past, that we may learn their cost, their lessons, and take warning from any mistakes by the way, and that we may plan broadly, intelligently and wisely for the future."

So spoke Governor Fairbanks one hundred years ago today.

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I could not accept the honor and challenge of delivering the message which tradition calls upon me to make this day without the counsel and perspective of those who have preceded me in such a challenge. And so I have been reading the gubernatorial messages delivered in Vermont through these years.

To do so is to marvel at the genius, the optimism, the versatility, and the abiding courage and faith in God which are revealed by those messages, not alone of the men who spoke them, but as those qualities are fully revealed in the character of the free men and women with whom they shared hopes and fears, burdens and goals.

History has its lessons, and its perspectives. It is at once intimidating and encouraging. It must intimidate us and humble us to know that so many great men and women have preceded us in these halls and set so high a standard of service and accomplishment against which we must measure our worthiness. But, at the same time, history furnishes us with encouragement as it notes that the giants of the past erred, too, yet tried again and again—succeeding often enough to let us know man can better himself, failing enough to let us know that they, too, must have had fears and self-doubts.

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Perhaps one of the repeated lessons of history is that many of the needs of men are never, and can never, be fully satisfied. We must find and know the limits of what we can do.

While we find not one single governor who turned away or who counseled Vermont to turn away from its obligations to educate, to heal, to feed and to house, to protect and to build, we find many who faced the dilemma of balancing some over-riding need against all others—or of weighing countless possibilities for service against limited capability.

And, from year to year, we see our forefathers searching for a satisfactory answer to the question which has plagued both philosophers and kings throughout recorded history—how can government serve widely and well without in the process becoming the master instead of the servant?

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Perhaps, while historical perspective is still sharply in mind, we should ask: What are the prospects for Vermont as it enters its third century?

In the state and in the nation we have traveled for more than a decade through shoal waters. Now, although we would not claim to be entirely free of danger, the way would surely seem to be more clear, and the risks at hand and ahead far less than those that lie behind. The nation is at peace, after a long siege which divided her as no war since that between the states. A national crisis between the generations which for a period seemed to threaten the continuity of our basic beliefs seems to have passed, and parents and children, teachers and students, seem once again to be communicating and learning from one another. The dreadful inflation of two years ago has greatly subsided. The deepest recession this country has seen since the great depression reached its turning point in April of 1975, and for eighteen months this nation and Vermont have seen greater employment, greater productivity and greater confidence among its people.

Here in Vermont a period of declining tax revenues is over. The deficit many feared for the fiscal period ending this coming June 30th will not come to pass—we will end this biennium with no deficit, and we will have erased the deficit with which it began.

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During the two years for which you will allocate spending, we can look forward to a modest increase in revenue available from existing taxes. The total is not likely to be such as to permit spending all that any of us might desire, nor is it so limited as to require us either to turn away from legitimate needs, or to increase taxes.

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These better times for Vermont are not, unfortunately, and significantly, better times for all Vermonters. We can and will face our obligations to work for improved circumstances for those who have not fully shared in the state's progress. As we face that challenge, however, we need not fail to recognize and give thanks, for the continued improvement in our opportunities.

There are needs, as always, which must be met by increased spending.

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Once again we are called upon by our Vermont tradition to provide educational opportunities to our children which will enable them to step into our places. The needs of elementary and secondary education, of special

education and of higher education, deserve, and I hope will be assigned, the highest single priority among all proposals for increased spending.

It will not be enough, however, for us merely to appropriate larger sums of money. We must meet, head-on, some problems which have long awaited the leadership of both the general assembly and of the executive. Governor Fairbanks observed one hundred years ago, "It is not so much the amount of money which we expend, as the character which we give to the public schools, that is all important."

The present formula for distributing the state revenue to supplement local school appropriations, pleases far fewer Vermonters than it aggravates. I find much of that aggravation justified. I will, therefore, be asking you to consider legislation to correct the present assumption that state funding should reach some fixed percentage of total educational costs. My proposal will establish a maximum cost for each school student in a school district against which state reimbursement for basic education can be made. I am also carefully considering a number of proposals for other changes in the present state aid formula. However, any change in the manner of allocation of state support for local education must assure that the change will, in fact, result in a more equitable access of all children to a basic education, and that such access not place a disproportionate hardship on the taxpayers of any town.

It is also clear that we must address, once again, the system of equalizing grand lists of the towns so that the respective tax bases of our local school districts are brought into line under some common denominator. I cannot tell whether it will comfort you or dismay you to know how long this problem has plagued Vermont legislators. More than a dozen governors have spoken, some with despair, of the issue. Governor John Page, in 1868, echoed the feelings of many of us, saying, "It is evident to many who have been called to administer our assessment laws that the burdens of taxation do not bear equally on all classes of property." And Governor Fairbanks, eight years later, observed, "Not infrequently has it been claimed that property of the same kind and value was placed in the grand list at different valuations in different sections of the state." He proposed a remedy and then he added "Whether such a revision can be effected in a single session of the legislature may be doubtful." One hundred years later, his appreciation of the scope of this problem comes forth as a masterful understatement.

But in 1977 we must face that issue. No system of distributing state aid which takes the local tax base into consideration will work without a reliable system of equalizing among the receiving districts. The legislature has abolished the former state property tax division, and so it is therefore imperative that we establish a new system for equalization. I believe the time has come for us to establish a regional appraisal system, supervised by a statewide lay-board, and I will support legislation similar to that which was before you last year to accomplish this purpose.

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Vermont has been a pioneer in special education. We are already in the fifth year of a ten-year plan to search out and adequately provide for the needs of our exceptional children. We have been proceeding in a timely and orderly way and are now prepared to *accelerate* this progress. It is my proposal that *we do so*.

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The first legislature of the state of Vermont had the vision to charter a state university and thereby to express its commitment to the advanced education of its citizens. Subsequent legislatures established the state colleges and the community college.

Inaugural messages through the years are sprinkled with warnings, still timely today, of the need for better coordination and cooperation of these institutions. We must satisfy ourselves that we are meeting the needs of Vermonters in education, in research and in service, while avoiding either redundancy or such scope as to assure continual under-funding of the truly essential programs.

At no time has funding for these institutions of higher learning matched the vision which created them. The university and the state colleges deserve the increased funding which will be recommended. To assure the availability of a college education to all qualified Vermonters and to soften the impact of recent tuition

increases at the University of Vermont, we must also increase support for the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation.

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It is inherent in the quality of life which we cherish that neighbors are to be trusted and that all should live in the comfort and peace of mind of being secure in their persons and property. Predictable law enforcement is perhaps one of the most basic expectations a people can have of their government.

We must substantially increase our capacity to protect people by strengthening and harmonizing all elements of law enforcement, the state police, and sheriffs and the local police. Improved morale and delineation of roles and functions for police officers is a first step that must be accomplished by a new attitude towards the process of prosecution, corrections and parole, ensuring that police, judges, state's attorneys and parole boards proceed with shared objectives. The message must be clear to potential offenders that this state holds the protection of its citizens as a matter of deep concern and there must be no misunderstanding as to the intent to enforce the laws.

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There are many Vermonters for whom this bright new year does not seem promising. There are men, women and children who have needs that they are presently unable to meet themselves. Only with sensitive support and assistance will they achieve their highest hope—that of self-accomplishment and self-fulfillment as productive citizens. Some will not be able to do so even with this help. And so in the field of human services I also see a pressing need for both increased funding and for review and assessment of the effectiveness of our various programs.

As inescapable as the financial needs may be, no less obvious is the need for a new and better philosophy. We have tended to assume over the years that suffering can be eliminated by increasing public expenditures. That assumption is as wrong today as it was in 1939 when Governor Aiken reminded this assembly that "The importance of public welfare services has grown far beyond the imagination of a few years past. Public consciousness demands public effort to provide opportunity, to promote security, and to prevent suffering. The demand for these things has far outstretched the taxpayers' capacity to pay."

It is my intention to structure a system which meets the real needs of Vermonters and *gently but firmly* assisting all who can meet their own needs to be placed in a position to do so.

Your understanding and counsel will certainly be required as we attempt to measure program against program, goal against accomplishment, rule against result.

As a first step, I intend to move promptly to integrate more fully the departments of the agency of human services, in order to facilitate a more coordinated and comprehensive delivery of effective assistance. We will move to treat individuals and families with attention to the root problems of their needs. We will seek to emphasize improvement in the capacity of individuals to earn income, as compared to the provision of services. We shall recommend strong measures to reduce abuse of welfare funds and unemployment benefits. We will maximize the possibilities for coordinating the temporary and permanent job finding facilities at the department of employment security and the federally sponsored comprehensive employment and training office.

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But we will be able to meet our responsibilities and to realize our opportunities, only if Vermont continues to strive for a strong economic base which will provide a broader range of employment opportunities to its citizens. Accordingly, sound economic development without unnecessary expansion of population must be a central concern of this legislature, as it will be of my administration.

If we will undertake the job of building up each of our great industries in balance—agriculture and forestry, recreation, and manufacturing—consistent with our goals of conserving our unique Vermont environment, we will be able to withstand the effects of national economic fluctuations far better than most other states. That, too, is a part of our proud and independent heritage.

Any failure to enhance the economic stability of our farms and forests will, over time, inevitably do damage to the quality of our environment. I will accordingly recommend to you several programs to encourage the increase in productivity and market opportunities of our lands.

Sound industrial and recreational development can live in harmony with the preservation of our beautiful Vermont if we use imagination and skill. We do not have to choose between adequate jobs and quality of life. We have only to make government attitudes towards business more constructive—to reap the benefits of increasingly strong employment and better income opportunities in this uniquely beautiful state.

The major thrust of our efforts must be to raise the quality of jobs available, not merely to bring additional jobs to the state. In doing so, we must take great care and make great effort to improve the access to economic development in every part of the state.

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It is my intention to place substantial emphasis on the role of the regional planning commissions as well as development groups in defining the needs and resources of our citizens and in creating the circumstances for broad productive use of our natural and our human resources.

I pledge the help and support of this administration to pursue anew the important goals of Act 250. I will, however, be looking more to the regions and to the local municipalities, for their help to achieve these goals. I will further endeavor to complete the program to assure for future generations that our Vermont streams and rivers will run clear and free from pollution and, I will give you my recommendations for the implementation of that goal. Those recommendations will emphasize the state's role as a coordinator of local efforts and as a seeker of citizen cooperation.

I have spoken particularly to this point of those programs and public efforts where the level of funding very largely defines capacity to serve. My budget message several weeks from now will be far more comprehensive in presenting recommendations for your decisions regarding spending.

Let us now turn to the consideration of areas in which fundamental changes in policy and structure are required.

Vermonters are justifiably deeply concerned about the increasing impact upon their lives of the cost of public utility services. There is no amount of state funding which will address itself to these concerns. It should be clear to all by now that the concept, structure, and operations of the public service board, established many decades ago to deal with problems of that time, fall far short of the capacity to address themselves to present problems.

I will propose legislation to separate the planning, regulatory and judicial functions now handled by the public service board, in order to provide adequate planning and oversight of our public utilities and more objective consideration of both immediate and long-term public interests.

Vermont *can* provide an example of energy conservation. State government must and will lead the way. We must initiate tangible projects which demonstrate that our forests can provide us with a source of energy without harming the environment. We must provide incentives to industry and to private consumers to conserve, including such items as differential automobile registration fees which are based on energy efficiency.

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No government can succeed if its people do not have confidence in it, nor can they be expected to have confidence unless the lines of communications between the citizenry and the government are open and accessible.

The so-called "governor's action line" has opened communications between thousands of Vermonters each year and their government and I believe is a foundation which should be built upon.

I shall propose for your consideration the creation of an office of public advocacy and research to be headed by an ombudsman who should have full cabinet rank to assure all citizens that their problems with any branch of state government will be given friendly, thoughtful, and objective attention.

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In recent weeks I have become increasingly concerned over the lack of trained women in middle management positions in state government. Without a positive effort to overcome this injustice, this situation will continue and will also continue to prevent the placement of qualified women in positions of top leadership. I intend to provide career opportunities for women in government through active pursuit of an affirmative action program. Vermont needs the talents and skills of its women, as well as of its men, and must make a concerted effort to bring this about.

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Now I come to a portion of this message which I believe to be of great importance and significance because it bears directly on the purpose and role of government.

Beyond funding of ongoing needs and even beyond changes in structure and circumstances there are three vital areas that require critical examination and decisive action. They are these: federal, state and local interaction, the effective management of the operating side of government, and the relationship between state government and its employees.

Vermont must seek a new relationship with the federal government, establishing her own authority in those areas where the rights and responsibilities of Vermont citizens must be sovereign.

Increasingly we find our scope of action defined by the structures and mandates of federal programs to which we have subscribed. Where programs and grants call upon us to enter into an area which we would not have chosen to enter at our own expense, we must be increasingly willing to decline participation.

We must also be more aggressive in presenting our positions as the federal administration develops regulations to implement the intent of federal legislation.

Of even greater concern, however, appears a relatively new inclination of the federal government to require the states to take actions at great expense for which the federal government itself makes no provisions for funding.

We must address ourselves to the issue posed by these and other similar federal demands which have the potential to destroy the effective and responsible implementation of Vermont's own programs designed to meet its own needs.

We should also remember that our own state government has an equal capability to needlessly interfere with the appropriate self-determination of the cities and towns of Vermont.

We must strongly reaffirm the proposition that the people will be better served when decisions are made by that unit of government closest to them and over which they have the greatest control.

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If there is one area which demands attention in this biennium, it is that which deals with the relationship between those of us in government and the people we serve,

Neither appropriations, nor legislation will succeed, unless the citizens are satisfied with the attitude and the competence of government.

To restore the people's faith in government, all of the elected and employed representatives of government must make it clear in their every contact with the citizenry that they know their job is service. Regulations must be administered with an intent to make possible the achievement of the valid goals of the citizens. To this spirit, to this attitude, to this determination to show the citizens of Vermont that we are all their servants, I pledge myself and convey the like pledges of those who will serve in appointed positions within this administration.

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Year after year, demands for the services of government have increased, as have taxes—far more rapidly than the income of the citizens who support government. Tax burdens have become a critical element determining the standard of living of tens of thousands of working Vermonters.

If we are not to turn away from essential needs in the face of injunction which wisdom places upon our authority to increase taxes, we must give thoughtful and imaginative attention to how we operate government and each program.

Although this responsibility rests clearly with the executive branch, we can learn much from the private sector about how to do jobs well but without waste.

Work is already well advanced to establish a governor's cost control council financed totally by the private sector, which I believe has great capacity to help us *do* our jobs better.

The work of government is not done by dollars, nor is it done by governors, or their appointees. Though much can be accomplished by competent and knowledgeable leadership. In the end it is the ability, the motivation, the understanding, and the good will of thousands of state employees which actually determines how well the people are served.

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I find no single area in which I believe the government of the state of Vermont to be in greater disrepair than that which defines the relationship between the state and its employees. I believe that for too long we have assumed that because state employees are engaged to serve us, we were entitled to treat them as though they were in servitude. We have not provided them with incomes comparable to those available to their friends and neighbors in private industry—we have not provided them with incentives for higher productivity—we have not given them clear goals. We have not shown them that dedicated service can lead to advancement within the ranks.

Despite these omissions on our part, there are many dedicated and highly competent individuals still in our employ. They are there, of course, because their desire to do a job exceeds their insistence upon the relationship usually to be found between a good employer and a good employee. It is clear that we have neither attracted as many qualified citizens to government employ as we ought to have, nor have we always maintained the best of those who have come to serve.

I believe it is quite possible that with better selection, compensation and leadership, the number of men and women now employed by the state of Vermont might possibly have rendered all of the services requested by all of those who sought additional funding for the next biennium.

And so if we do nothing else in this session, let us make sure we have set in motion a process by which we will have moved toward a more capable body of public servants who will merit the widest possible public support.

The achievement of this goal will place very substantial responsibilities on the governor, the agency secretaries, and the commissioners. But it will require, in addition, broad understanding and authorizations from the legislature to establish the conditions under which we may seek the required progress in this area.

I am prepared to propose to you, on certain vital conditions which I shall make clear in a moment, that the state provide its employees with one of the largest pay increases in history. I am prepared to propose to you total compliance with the findings of the compensation review board of an 11.6% adjustment to bring pay up to that level considered presently comparable to wages in the private sector, plus an additional 5% to allow for inflation from the date of the studies to July 1, 1977.

Before I can make such a recommendation, I shall need to feel certain that the employees and their representatives will assist us to remove all barriers to the establishment of a set of work procedures and standards and opportunities for productivity which will also be comparable to private industry.

Not the least of these will be the establishment of a standard straight-time, forty-hour week as is common in the private sector. Further we shall need to discuss revision in procedures by which we seek out and hire state employees, systems by which we advance and promote state employees, and the procedures by which we are entitled to discharge those employees who do not render service to the state of value comparable to that which they are paid.

I shall seek your approval of legislation in two other critical areas to move toward this goal. First, I propose that the state undertake to bargain collectively, through open and constructive negotiations between employer and employee, all items relating to compensation and economic benefits. I will call on the compensation review board to serve an important function in that process, to assure me that I have the most current and objective information relating to compensation and those other elements which clearly bear on the appropriateness and justice of all elements of the compensation package.

I understand, of course, that no governor can be committed in advance to any group, under any circumstances, to reach any specific agreement as it is my responsibility to recommend for your consideration a course of action appropriately allocating our total capacity against our total needs.

I intend to utilize the process of open and straight-forward negotiation within the constraints imposed upon me as governor to achieve a responsible, rewarding, and mutually satisfactory basis for a strong employment relationship between the state of Vermont and its loyal and hard-working employees.

Secondly, I shall seek your support for legislation broadening the role and the scope of the personnel department so it may become a department of employee relations charged broadly with improving the morale and effectiveness of state employees and with providing services in career counseling and with increasing opportunities for in-service education designed to improve the capacity for service.

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It is clear to me, as it must be to you, that in this address I have outlined needs for action and for funding which will tax both our stamina and our ability. To strive to do great things is to risk great failures. Perhaps that is the inevitable lot of man reaching to fulfill his aspirations. But you and I have no more choice as to whether or not we make history than did our ancestors. We can only decide what kind of history. The wisdom, good-will and dedication so common among those who led Vermont these last 200 years brings us the heritage we so cherish. And now we in our turn must act knowing that our successes, and our failures, will become the heritage of those who will follow. The outcome is in our hands. Let us proceed together asking God's blessings on our labors.

Thank you.

BENEDICTION

The Benediction was pronounced by the Most Reverend John A. Marshall of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, Vermont.

DISSOLUTION

The Governor, having completed the reading of his message, was escorted to the Executive Chamber by the Committee.

The Supreme Court was escorted from the Hall by the Sergeant at Arms.

The Joint Assembly dissolved.

RICHARD C. THOMAS
Secretary of State, Clerk