

Farewell Address  
of  
James H. Douglas

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## Farewell Address

“Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, distinguished guests, my fellow Vermonters:

“Thirty-eight years ago, in this very chamber, I was sworn in as the new member from Middlebury – humbled by the confidence of voters, motivated to represent my community and inspired to strengthen Vermont. Over the years I have been blessed to serve the people of this great state in different ways – and in different eras – culminating with the honor, and profound responsibility, of the governorship.

“When I contemplated running for governor in 2001, I outlined my reasons for wanting to serve in this office. I wrote then:

“I love Vermont... I want every Vermonter to reach his or her highest potential. I want every child to begin life in good health, with a loving family, and eager to learn. I want every young Vermonter to be able to access a higher education and to secure meaningful and rewarding work. I want families to be able to afford a home and ultimately to enjoy retirement in comfort and dignity....”

“I carried this piece of paper with me every day. This vision was at the center of every discussion, every proposal and every decision. My inspiration never changed. My motivation never wavered.

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“We are blessed with the finest system of self-governance the world has known, one that requires leaders who value actions more than words, who can be bold but humble, and speak plainly the truth; leaders who have passion and patience, resilience and restraint; and, above all else, leaders who are unwavering in their commitment to the people they serve.

“It is our great responsibility to devote ourselves to service so that we may build a better future for the next generation. That is what I have tried to do.

“As I reflect on the last eight years, I am proud of the progress we made in health care, for the safety of our communities, for our natural environment, for our economy and in our fiscal strength. I am proud that we ensured that access to government is not a privilege, but a right for all people. But most of all, I am proud of the improvements we made in the lives and well-being of the people of Vermont. After all, that is why we serve.

“But the work of democracy – our role in the constant cultivation of an ever more perfect union – is never done. Tomorrow, my service as your governor will end. I will return to private life, handing the reins to a new administration that will take up the responsibility of protecting and advancing the goals we share. On behalf of all Vermonters, Governor-Elect Shumlin, I wish you and your team the very best.

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“For four consecutive years, Vermont has been ranked the healthiest state in the union. We achieved real results by getting to the root cause of illness. Our approach has set us apart and has become the model that others, including the federal government, would look to as they sought improved access to health care in America.

“We understood that making health care more affordable means the most important issue is not “who pays,” but “how much we pay.” A patient-centered approach that focuses on chronic conditions, wellness, and greater utilization of technology has been at the heart of our Blueprint for Health. This is the same formula we used to save Medicaid with Global Commitment. And it was with the same principles – and with a sincere commitment to bipartisanship – that we enacted cutting-edge reforms in 2006 resulting in Catamount Health and Green Mountain Care.

“Today, Vermont enjoys one of the lowest percentages of uninsured residents of any state and we are the best positioned to adapt to ongoing federal reforms.

“Vermonters can be proud of the national leadership we have demonstrated on this critical social, economic and fiscal challenge – but there will always be more to do. Vermont’s ground-breaking approach holds the greatest promise for reducing costs, increasing quality and providing universal access.

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“Providing for the protection of the people is a fundamental obligation of government. We lived up to that commitment and made our communities safer from drugs and violent criminals.

“We created the DETER program – Vermont’s first comprehensive and coordinated commitment to combating drugs. We invested in education and prevention, expanded treatment and rehabilitation, and significantly increased penalties for those who seek to poison our children for profit.

“In the last eight years, we passed sweeping sex offender legislation, stepped up efforts to end child abuse and domestic violence, and confronted the insidious effects of bullying.

“We strengthened law enforcement by putting more troopers on the road and placing special investigation units in all regions of our state to combat sex crimes.

“At the same time we reformed our system of corrections, ensuring that those who are threats to society have the proper supervision, while others who can be given a second chance have the best opportunity to succeed. “As a result, crime rates have declined, we have turned the tide on the growth of our inmate population and Vermont is consistently ranked one of the safest places in the nation.

“I want to thank those in the Legislature and in our law enforcement community who have worked closely with me on these critical issues. We have always put the safety of Vermonters first.

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“There are few places in the world that match Vermont’s natural beauty. No matter how long you have lived here, you can never get over the excitement of winter’s first snow, the sight of sugaring in spring, the summer smell of newly-mown hay or the stunning colors of a brilliant fall. Indeed, this is a special place.

“In the last eight years, we not only upheld our state’s environmental traditions – we strengthened them in realistic and responsible ways. We pursued “The Vermont Way,” recognizing the codependence of our environment and our economy.

“Today, we are at the forefront of energy efficiency and renewable energy policy. And we took a strong leadership position in addressing climate change through efforts like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and tough automobile emission standards.

“Our commitment to preserving Vermont’s outdoor traditions has resulted in the improved health and size of our big game populations and thriving fisheries. We prioritized the active management of state forest land and revitalized Vermont’s state park system. We invested unprecedented resources in the health of Lake Champlain and our network of rivers and streams.

“Vermont is known the world over for its green ethic. Because of our efforts and the efforts of those who have come before, we are ranked repeatedly as the greenest state in the nation – a distinction we expect and deserve.

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“I can’t remember a day on the road when I didn’t hear concerns about the economy and the burden of taxation from the people of our state. Small business owners would tell of how high heating and electricity costs threaten their livelihoods. Homebuilders spoke of the need for permit reform and young entrepreneurs expressed their frustration at the lack of access to the capital necessary to make their dreams a reality. And I will never forget the stories from mothers and fathers struggling to get by on one income or reduced wages, having to make sacrifices to weather the economic storm.

“Over the last eight years we fought back against two global recessions, including the deepest downturn since the Great Depression. We did that with fiscal discipline and innovative economic development strategies to encourage employers to expand here and others to locate here. We renewed our commitment to our traditional industries by helping those who keep our working landscapes working. We leveraged our natural gifts in support of our tourism economy and helped Vermont businesses realize greater access to emerging foreign markets. We took steps to make our permitting system more predictable and our tax policies more competitive.

“Vermont’s brand of quality, our deserved reputation for a well-educated workforce and our commitment to environmental excellence make this a great place to start or grow a business.

“But to compete in today’s globally connected economy we must continue to fortify our foundations of growth, as we have. With the help of the Road to Affordability, our transportation system is better maintained and funded. Together, we embarked on an ambitious plan to connect every resident with the tools of the 21st century. Young Vermonters now have a better chance to compete and succeed thanks to new investments in scholarships and workforce training. And we secured a large portion of our energy future from a renewable, reliable and affordable source.

“By advancing pro-growth job creation policies, Vermont has fared better than most states. Our unemployment rate is among the lowest in the nation and our economy is considered one of the most resilient.

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“Our ability to prosper is also a function of our fiscal management. We spent within our means, replenished and protected our stabilization reserves, and improved the effectiveness and efficiency of government. Even as the Great Recession squeezed revenues, we protected the most vulnerable and reformed programs to help those who haven't fallen on hard times realize a path back to self-sufficiency and independence.

“When people look to Vermont they see a greater degree of certainty in our public finances than elsewhere. They see a history of responsible spending and prudent management of public funds. Our bond ratings are among the highest and Vermont is recognized as one of the best managed states.

“From groundbreaking health care reforms to our unprecedented efforts to clean up our waterways, we have achieved so much in the last eight years because of – not in spite of – our rock-solid commitment to fiscal discipline. By closely managing the state's finances, pushing necessary reforms and working to ease the burden of taxation, we have been able to advance responsible initiatives for the betterment of all Vermonters. Without that commitment, hard-won progress will be easily lost.

“So as the dark clouds of recession start to break, I'm proud of all that we have done to lead our state forward to a new era of prosperity.

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“But success is not rankings, initiatives and legislative accomplishments alone. Indeed, our plans will evolve and change; new technologies and new ideas will allow for new opportunities; and unforeseen challenges will emerge. But what endures – the legacy that is left – is found in the lives and stories of the people of this great state.

“It is found in the story of a mother who, because of our Choices for Care program, can now care for her daughter at home. It is found in the story of a high school graduate who was able to pay for college with the help of a Next Generation Scholarship.

“It is found in the story of a woman who gained control of her chronic illness because of our Blueprint for Health.

“It is found in the story of a small business owner who, aided by the Vermont Employment Growth Incentive, is providing jobs to fellow Vermonters.

“It is found in the story that fortunately does not have to be told because a young Vermonter made the right choice when confronted with drugs.

“And this legacy is found in the stories of the Green Mountain Boys, and all Vermonters serving in our armed services who have volunteered to stand in harm’s way on battlefields around the world, and in our sorrow for those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

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“It is these stories and countless others like them that have inspired me to work as hard as I could, every day.

“Serving as governor of Vermont has been an honor unmatched in my life. My will to lead, the courage to do what is right, and the determination to fight for those who do not have a voice is renewed from the strength of Vermonters I’ve met along the way.

“This job was not one that I could do alone – no one can. I am deeply grateful to all who helped. Finding the right words to properly acknowledge the contributions of so many is difficult, if not impossible – but I would be remiss if I did not try.

“To our elected leadership at every level, from school boards to the State House, public service is a noble endeavor and I commend you for your willingness to serve and thank you for your dedication to our state. Through every debate – no matter how contentious – I sought to uphold our tradition of dignified civil discourse, to bring people together around shared goals and, when differences could not be bridged, never faulted others for sincerely held convictions. In a time of searing political rhetoric on the national stage, the way we conduct our public business here in Vermont is something of which we can be very proud.

“To my cabinet and staff, my deep gratitude for answering my call to service and fulfilling your obligations with the highest degree of professionalism and dedication. Your hard work, ideas and counsel have been indispensable.

“To Lt. Governor Dubie, your leadership in the areas of foreign trade, energy, economic development and so many others was critical to Vermont’s progress. Your friendship means so much to me and I am grateful to have had you at my side these last eight years. Thank you for your service to our state.

“To my family, this journey would not have been possible without your love and support. To Dorothy, in particular, you have been an unwavering partner and I couldn’t have asked for more. Thank you.

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“For over thirty-eight years, I’ve focused all of my energies on a singular purpose – to make Vermont a better place. Across thousands of miles, through bright morning dawns and days that stretched to night, though sometimes weary, I never lost faith in the promise of Vermont. And as the long arc of my career draws close, I look back and know with all certainty that our state and her people have been most worthy of a life’s work.

“In the years to come, as I pass over the high gaps of the Green Mountains and take in the full breadth of Vermont – from its clear flowing waters up to its majestic crowns – I will be forever thankful for this land we call home.

“Thank you, my fellow Vermonters, for the unparalleled opportunity to serve as your governor. Public service is a privilege and the faith you have placed in me is humbling.

“May God bless you all and the great state of Vermont.”

### **Dissolution**

The Governor, having completed his farewell message, was escorted from the Hall by the Committee. There being no further business, the President declared the Joint Assembly to be dissolved.

JOHN H. BLOOMER, JR.  
Secretary of the Senate  
Clerk of the Joint Assembly