

Executive Speech  
of  
Ezra Butler  
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## SPEECH OF GOV. BUTLER— 1827<sup>1</sup>.

*Gentlemen of the Council and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives: —*

Called by the suffrages of the people, I again engage on the duties assigned me. On the present occasion permit me not only to acknowledge my obligation to the freemen for their continued confidence, but my gratitude to Him who has protracted my life, and continued the prosperity of the state another year. The instances of mortality constantly thinning the ranks of those accustomed to legislation, cannot fail to remind us all, of the slender tenure by which we hold office and life.

It is necessary that the business for which we have assembled, should be prosecuted with decorum, deliberation and dispatch, in order to promote the interests of and give general satisfaction to the people. On the wisdom, by you to be manifested, in the numerous appointments you have to make, will the reputation, the peace and morality of the state, much depend.

Education is of too great importance ever to escape the notice of wise legislators. Many among the well-informed have thought our laws deficient as they regard the expenditure of public money raised for the support of common schools — that a proper board should be appointed, in each county or town, for the examination of those who are to be employed as instructors; and that every town should appoint suitable persons to visit the schools. Should it be thought that an act to effect these objects would render the expenditure of public money more useful to community, you have the example of some of our sister states for your encouragement in trying the experiment.

To the subject of lotteries the attention of the legislature was called, last session. Permit me to ask your further attention to what was then communicated for I have seen no just cause for altering the opinion then expressed. The act of that session is, in my view, of doubtful tendency. And should it prove as salutary as its supporters expected, can never close the door against the admission of an evil allowed on all hands to be highly demoralizing in its tendency. The money received by the state, although expended for the best of purposes, will, never, fully compensate community for the various species of immorality that will have received encouragement.

A bill entitled “An act to abolish imprisonment for debt,” published with the acts of the last session, will claim your attention. The subject has repeatedly occupied the consideration of the legislature; and although the object is desirable, yet the manner in which it can be effected with safety to all concerned, seems not to have been discovered. The bill, in its present shape, is too complicated to answer the best purpose. It would increase litigation rather than discourage it — embarrass the administration of justice, rather than promote it. If concealment of property should be constituted a crime, and punished with severity as such, executions might issue against the property only, of the debtor, with as much safety to the creditor, as the constitution, or justice require. This subject is important—it has engrossed the minds of many for years past, and if nothing further should meet your approbation, I hope the propriety of compelling the creditor to provide for the support of his debtor, during his confinement, will be duly considered.

Our statutes will all pass in review before you. But it should be kept in mind that every unnecessary alteration is, not only perplexing and inconvenient in the administration of justice, but often the occasion of injurious mistakes. Where the necessity of new enactments has become obvious, let us act without fear; but with due caution.

For some months past, several engineers, in the employment of the general government, have engaged in examining different routes for canals in this state but as to the result of their labors no information can at this time be given.

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<sup>1</sup> From the printed *Assembly Journal* of 1827.

A communication has been received from the ordinance department of the United States, by which it appears there is now ready for the use of this state one thousand five hundred and nineteen muskets, as its quota for the four years last past. If desired, other arms or accoutrements, of equal value, will be furnished. These arms will be sent to any designated place in Vermont to which they can be conveyed by water. As the arms are not wanted for present I have delayed to direct their removal to any place in this state; and will still wait the order of the legislature in relation to them.

Permit me here to suggest the propriety of landing these arms at Burlington and that they be brought from thence to some place to be provided for that purpose, near the seat of government, and kept in good order until wanted for use. Should the proposition meet your approbation, provision must be made to carry it into effect. The legislature will then have opportunity to know the actual condition of the arms, from year to year, without further expense or inconvenience. In no part of the state can they be more secure, or to every part more readily distributed, should the unhappy necessity of using them ever occur. It is to be feared that most of the arms heretofore received from the United States will be of little further use to the state, should no additional attention be paid to the subject. But those now to be received are, doubtless, in good order, and may easily be preserved in that condition; and as the number will from time to time be increased, your attention to the subject seems the more necessary.

Several resolutions from our sister states have been received, which will in due time be submitted for your consideration.

The people of this state can never remain indifferent observers of the proceedings of Congress, or the course pursued by the Executive of the general government. And we have too much confidence in the rectitude of our motives, and correctness of our views, to conceal them. So far as the public good may require, they should be made known. Let every state in the union do the same, and it may be of some service to that government on which we all depend for national security, and the protection of our rights. The dereliction of duty in the last Congress, so well calculated to impair the confidence of the public in the national legislature, is a matter of serious regret. For that body to refuse protection to the industry of a majority of the people, when the necessity had become too obvious to be mistaken, is just cause of complaint; for it is wounding to the laudable pride of our country. Had no other important interest been neglected the wound would have been less painful, and might have been borne in silence. However for the present, we can but cherish the hope, that by the next Congress all just cause of dissatisfaction will be removed, and the confidence of the people again restored to the Legislature on whose wisdom and integrity the United States are in so high a degree dependent for her prosperity.

The preparations making for the next presidential election seem to have brought to view political doctrines that will, when reduced to practice, endanger the stability of our institutions, and tend to their final overthrow. Among others that, in my opinion, are dangerous, this is not the least that is improper and unsafe to give any man a second election as President, however just, wise and prosperous his administration may have been, for the first term. This idea is novel and I am inclined to think the remark has been hastily thrown out with but little consideration, and will, when duly examined, be retracted. There can be no better guide in politicks than past experience. Look at the present prosperous condition of the United States — three successive administrations continued eight years each: one after another steadily progressing in prosperity and credit at home and abroad. Is all this to be forgotten in our future march? Or shall this instructive lesson be improved as a lamp to our path? It is true no one can say what would have been the consequence if Jefferson had not received his second election and Madison, and Monroe, had shared the same fate and all three, one after another, had been dismissed from public service at the end of their first term. But all must know, that the state [nation] would have lost twelve years' service of those able statesmen; and that too not the least useful part of their services. Add to this the hazard and risque, of selecting three new candidates to serve four years each. Let the candid decide whether the doctrine that has heretofore prevailed is not more safe for the country than that against which I contend. Due consideration will convince any one, that it is unjust as well as unsafe. There is no other way in which the great body of the freemen can express their approbation of the first four years' administration, but by a second election. Should that take place, and should the same course be pursued the last four, the president leaves the chair of state with the sealed approbation of the nation — his reputation is secure forever, as it ought to be. Not so with him who receives no second election. A direct stigma is cast either on his person or his policy.

The disgrace must follow him to the close of life; and in the present condition of society, would be visited on his descendants. Would it have been just for the country to have treated either of the exalted individuals I have named, in the manner lately proposed to treat every one who may hereafter occupy the chair of state? Had the constitution been so framed, or should this idea so prevail that a second election can never take place, the honest patriot would always be deprived of the reward he most esteems for all his services – there would be no way left by which the people are distinctly to decide whom they approve and whom they disapprove. The good and the bad, the wise and the simple, are all alike to be thrown aside as useless lumber. Is this just? But the injustice to individuals has not been the occasion of these remarks. The increased dangers to which our institutions would be exposed is that which most deserves our attention. The doctrine against which I protest, in its practical operation, would in all cases deprive the state of the services of the ablest statesmen, at a time when they would be most capable of being useful, and perhaps too, at a time when their services would be indispensably necessary to preserve the country from distraction, and the government from dissolution. Again, the reins of government must be committed to new hands once every four years; and if the views of some are to guide us, they ought to be taken, not from the cabinet, but from some other employment or station, in which they have had little or no acquaintance with the duties they now have to perform and direct. On every occasion of the kind, heretofore, we have given the reign to no man until he had been well disciplined, and had become acquainted with the duties he had to perform; and had given evidence of his ability and integrity. It appears to me there is some risk in placing the power of the nation in unexperienced hands, every four years. It may be further observed, that to unite the public mind on any individual to fill that most important office, is no trifling undertaking. The subject has, on every occasion, employed the talents and pens of our ablest and best citizens, with the deepest concern. And to this subject the ambitious and designing will *never* be inattentive. If it has been so difficult to concentrate the public opinion once in eight years, will it not be much more so, to unite on a new candidate once in every four? The danger of electing incompetent and designing men, is greatly increased. Double the number must be elected – the more frequent the draughts, the more difficult the choice – and still more doubtful whether it will be good. The more I have thought on this subject, the more fully I am confirmed in the opinion so often expressed by the people of the United States – and that the same opinion will still prevail, we are not inclined to doubt.

The unbending integrity, the wisdom and prudence, of the administration of the general government, as it richly merits, so it will receive the approbation of a sagacious, enlightened, and virtuous community. Every year furnishes additional evidence of the wisdom manifested in the last presidential election. The wise and prudent course, pursued by our government, for twenty-four years previous to that auspicious event, has been faithfully observed, by those now at the head of the government. The American system must, and will be supported; or the retrograde march of our country will soon commence.

Every exertion made by the legislature, to promote the interest of the state, as connected with that of community at large, will receive my cordial support.

EZRA BUTLER.