

Farewell address

of

Deane C. Davis

As it appears in the

Journal

of the

Joint Assembly.

1973

Thursday, January 4, 1973

Farewell Address

RETIRING MESSAGE

Mr. President, thank you so very much for those extremely generous words. Speaker Kennedy, President Pro Tem Janeway, Governor elect Salmon and Mrs. Salmon, and all of the members of this distinguished Joint Assembly and your guests, here today.

Under a well established tradition 71 Governors have stood at the legislative rostrum in Vermont, to mark the end of their administrations. I am sure all of these have done so with nostalgia and a certain amount of regret. I am no exception. These four years have broadened my knowledge and my appreciation of the qualities which mark Vermont living as something very special indeed. To be involved with you in the mainstream of action has been a priceless privilege and I thank you for the courtesies which you have so generously extended to me and for the help which you have so often given.

Today, I would like to spend the short time that I have to address you sharing with you some of my thoughts on where we are today in Vermont, and what seems to be ahead.

Four years ago I came into office with a strong conviction that the most important issue in the state of Vermont, at this time, was building for a sound solid foundation for its fiscal affairs. Part of that need would be expressed in some reorganization of the administrative branch. As time went on I came to realize that these problems were only a symptom of a much greater challenge: the challenge to preserve as much as possible of what we loosely call the Vermont quality of life.

What is the Vermont quality of life? Can we describe it? Can we agree on it? Is it a physical thing? Open spaces, friendly hills, wooded terrain, gurgling brooks, solitude of woods, lakes and streams? Or is it an attitude of mind?

No, I do not believe we can fully define it – nor can we wholly agree on it. But we can sense it. And we feel it, we can join together to preserve it, at least substantial parts of it that do exist. It is partly a thing of history. The history of young men and women from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania. All who saw the ownership of land as the indispensable condition by which first class citizenship was to be obtained.

Those early Vermont settlers, coming as they did by ox team, on horseback, on foot, and occasionally by canoe, even then did not cluster together. They settled on lands widely separated. As a Connecticut school child, who had visited in the summer once wrote, “Vermont is a place where the trees grow close together and the people live far apart.” These early Vermonters achieved the mastery that comes from conquering their own problems. They taught their sons and daughters to be self-reliant, to worship God, and to be always truthful.

And yet, these self-reliant Vermonters had a strong sense of duty to their neighbors. They helped raise each others’ houses and barns, they “changed works” and they did the neighbors’ chores when sickness or death struck. And this neighborly spirit became an integral part of Vermont life and passed on from generation to generation. Vermonters lived frugally, they paid their bills, but they had a strong sense of social and community responsibility. And social service was something you were obligated to perform, not something you had a right to receive.

Their attitude toward the local and state governments they created reflects their attitude toward life and the kind of character they respected. They believed that government was necessary – but only for those things that individuals and neighbors couldn’t do. The closer they could keep their government to themselves, the better government it would be. Then Vermont passed from the pioneer days to the agricultural era and this, too, fostered the same qualities of life and character.

It was not many years ago that Vermont was a state everyone wanted to visit but where few chose to live. As many traditional industries declined an out-migration of people continued, we grasped at such slogans as “See Vermont” and “The Beckoning Country.” These slogans reflected more of an action than they did an

agreement upon goals of a free people. We were begging people to come to Vermont in the belief that sheer numbers would solve our problems.

Then during the 1960's, as we are so well aware, the tables began to turn. Suddenly Vermont was no longer perceived as simply a beautiful pastoral state, fun to visit but a hard scrabble place in which to live. No longer poor, yet still retaining so many qualities of life which other states have lost, Vermont today is being subjected to population growth, changing land use, and mass consumption never known before.

In the early sixties the excitement and optimism engendered by all this new activity and growth spread rapidly and people began to ask for change; for change in government and for new ideas. The Legislature responded and with high hopes moved into a whole new series of open-ended programs.

By the late '60's the future costs of these programs began to become apparent and a reaction set in. We were not paying our bills. We were spending more than our income. The reasons were not hard to find. We aspired to a level of public service equal to those of our more wealthy neighbor states to the south and west. We had let ourselves become locked into programs, both state and federal, which, excellent as they were, obligated an ever increasing share of our state revenues.

Four years ago, our goal was to reestablish a balanced budget as a basic and fundamental principle of good government. To do so required the imposition of an unpopular tax and adherence to a philosophy of budget control that sets a definite limit to what could be appropriated or spent. What was that limit? First, it was the establishment of the basic principle that if you are going to spend money you first have to raise the taxes to pay for it and, second, the outside limit of spending should be measured by the annual growth in receipts from present sources of taxation resulting from annual growth in Vermont's Gross Product. In government there is no better test for the propriety of an expenditure than our willingness to pay for it. We have lived rigidly by those limits these past four years.

It will be noticed that this administration, during the last four years, has not recommended to the legislature one single major new program calling for substantial expenditures.

Why, then, has the dollar cost of government continued to rise so fast? The answer is quite simple. It has four parts to it. First, inflation accounts for 20% of that rise.

Second, the increased amount of funds contributed to the towns over the four years.

Third, the natural growth resulting from increased population and the consequent increased number of beneficiaries eligible for state services.

Fourth, and most importantly, the automatic expansion resulting from the open-ended nature of the major social programs such as welfare and education.

During these four years we have taken major steps looking toward reorganization of the administrative branch of state government. There is more to be done. I believe it is timely for me to emphasize to you again, my strong and continued belief in the positive effects of reorganization. Our government structure, with its built-in duplication and intentional decentralization, was a remnant of our historic past when fear and tyranny, as it existed both in New York State and England, caused our forefathers to design a government over which no single man or group of men could gain control. The realization – four years ago – that we now had more to fear from an unmanageable, unaccountable, massive governmental bureaucracy than from external tyranny, led us to reorganization. The bringing together of related department, the introduction of indicators of success in our budget process, and the creation of a cabinet does not solve every problem, but it does provide the means of doing a better job at less cost than we could otherwise expect.

The third major goal of my administration which emerged in 1969 was the preservation and enhancement of Vermont's environment. I think it is eternally to the credit of the Legislature that Vermont acted promptly and forcefully to inaugurate what has been described by many experts as the most sophisticated and forward looking environmental control measures yet enacted by any state in this country. We have acted while we still have so much to preserve and protect.

Though the job is far from finished, we can be proud even that today our streams are cleaner, our air clearer and our roadsides less cluttered. Simple achievements, yet unmatched anywhere in America.

But, as I look back I realize that my early perception of state government and the needs of Vermont did not go clear to the root of the problem. Progress toward reorganization, fiscal responsibility and environmental control is only the foundation upon which we now stand as we confront the fundamental question: How shall we preserve the Vermont way of life? In the past four years we Vermonters have developed a sense of awareness of what is happening in our state and I believe we have, for the first time in years, developed a real and positive sense of direction. This, above all else, I believe is the greatest achievement of the past four years.

In 1970 the Legislature was aware that in the 20 years between 1950 and 1970 the population of Vermont grew more than in the entire century between 1850 and 1950. In 1970 the rate of growth was still accelerating. From 1970 until 1990, we know Vermont will have to accommodate at least 184,000 new residents, a number equal to the present combined populations of Chittenden, Grand Isle, Franklin, Lamoille and most of Addison Counties. Certain fundamental questions arise:

Where will these people live?

How will they support themselves or be supported?

Where will we build their schools and highways and health facilities and sewage plants?

What will happen to taxes?

Will we be able to continue to freely hunt our woods, fish our streams, roam our winter countryside and enjoy our lakes and mountains?

Will there be the same rate of growth among the 4,000,000 visitors that now come annually to the state?

How about the increasing number of families that now make a second home in Vermont?

Will we become an extended suburb of Boston, New York and Montreal?

How can the people of Vermont provide for coordinated, efficient and economic development of the state in a period of such sweeping change?

When the General Assembly passed Act 250 in 1970, it was responding to those questions, which were brought to its attention by the troubles of towns in Vermont first exposed to the effects of rapid and unplanned development; steeply rising land values from land speculation; matching tax increase as service demands followed sub-division and development; the inability of farms and small business to bear the tax increases; the overloading of roads and schools and other town services to the point of disruption of the community.

The questions were addressed in Act 250, which directed the Environmental Board to adopt and the Governor to approve for submission to the Legislature a Capability and Development plan. Consider, if you will, your mandate to the board and me:

“The board shall adopt a capability and development plan consistent with the interim land capability plan which shall be made with general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, efficient and economic development of the state, which will in accordance with present and future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, order, convenience, prosperity and welfare of the inhabitants, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development, including but not limited to, such distribution of population and of the uses of the land for urbanization, trade, industry, habitation, recreations, agriculture, forestry, and other uses as will tend to create conditions favorable to transportation, health, safety, civic activities and educational and cultural opportunities, reduce the wastes of financial and human resources which result from either excessive congestion or excessive scattering of population and tend toward an efficient and economic utilization of drainage, sanitary and other facilities and resources and the conservation and production of the supply of food, water and minerals.”

I have thus far avoided making specific recommendations to you this morning, for I feel that is the duty and responsibility of the new Governor. But I shall make an exception with regard to the Capability and

Development Plan, for I have been able to fulfill your mandate to me only on the eve of my departure from office. The Plan I signed yesterday is of such fundamental, paramount importance that I would like to discuss it with you briefly.

This plan, in the form in which it was originally cast, and prior to approval by the Governor or the State Environmental Board, was printed and widely distributed. It was sent to some 160,000 households across the state. Public hearings were held in which large numbers of the public expressed their opinions. Careful records were kept.

Since it completed its public hearings in early December, I have remained in close touch with the Board to assure myself that, in the process of redrafting the Plan, the many sound and practical suggestions by Vermonters were taken fully into account and included wherever possible. The completely revised Capability and Development Plan you will have before you is a product of that careful review and revision of the Board's first draft.

As you will see, some of the major changes made by the Board following its public hearings include the following:

First: The Board is presenting at this time only the redrafted Capability and Development Plan and will defer the revision of the Section 20 Land Use Plan and Map. The Board will take into account the General Assembly's consideration of and action on the revised Section 19 Plan, and will also refine the information necessary for an accurate and practical Map. Pending legislative adoption of the Section 19 Plan, the Board has also decided to drop any provision in this Plan for State "certification" control over local and regional planning efforts.

Secondly: The Board has revised the Plan to re-emphasize the importance to Vermonters of better job opportunities as well as the fundamental goal of conserving our irreplaceable scenic beauty and natural resources.

Third: The Plan has been completely re-structured, unnecessary and repetitive language has been eliminated, and its two distinct and separate functions made clearer: first, it provides policy guidelines to, and not control of, local and regional land use planning and regulation, and second, specific criteria are provided for district environmental commissions in their consideration of permits for those substantial developments which are subject to Act 250.

Now before you, reworked and revised after the public hearings and as adopted by the Environmental Board and signed by me, what does this Capability and Development Plan do?

First: It provides the groundwork for the preparation of the Vermont Land Use Plan, by a cooperative effort on state, regional and local levels, and gives to local and regional planning commissions the broad guidelines for a consistent and practical program of land use and resource conservation.

Secondly: It recognizes the vital state-wide concern with the proper conservation of certain specified irreplaceable natural resources, such as our highly productive farm soils, our flood plains and higher elevations, our running waters and game habitats, and our mineral and forest resources.

Third: It also recognizes that the development and conservation of the great majority of our Vermont lands is primarily of regional and local concern, and thus can best be planned for and controlled by our towns and regions aided by the guidelines of this Plan, using local and regional planning implemented by local zoning and subdivision ordinances.

Fourth: It provides the necessary planning framework for guiding the patterns of development and settlement of our state, to insure that, when growth does come to our towns and cities, we can retain our traditional Vermont communities free of sprawl and exploitation, and that our rural towns, in particular, may deal with growth without the now too familiar crushing increases in demands for services and the following doubling and doubling again of the tax burden on our undeveloped lands, by real estate property tax.

The opposition to the original draft was substantial. The changes in the present draft will soften that opposition but will not eliminate it. As one who grew up on the land in the heyday of an agricultural society, I think I understand that opposition, for I have an emotional sympathy with it.

I wish it were possible for us to go back to the days of the 20's and the 30's in Vermont. It was a glorious time as I look backward. But the clock will not turn back. Change is our destiny. I have spend a good part of the last four years pondering what change means to Vermont and what we can and should do to control it lest it control and overwhelm us.

The respective rights of individuals and of the public in and to land has been the concern of the law and of society for generations. The balance has altered from generation to generation. But one thing is clear – these decisions could not, should not and were not made in a vacuum – they must be made with a view to the actual existing conditions. As one who has lived his whole life in Vermont, I can say to you with deep conviction; the land upon which the life cycle depends, which produces the forest growth from which the very air we breathe is generated, must be protected if we are to sustain the Vermont quality of life. This proposed plan approved by the Board, which I have signed, is an honest attempt to provide the indispensable guidelines to town and district planning commissions, regional development boards, municipalities, developers, builders and all who will have a part in molding the future of Vermont. Change it, amend it, or modify it if you will. Improve it where you can – but pass it in some form that truly meets the objectives which you laid down in the mandate of Section 19. We must not lose the momentum which has already accomplished so much toward saving for our children the values which we call the Vermont quality of life.

At this point I should like to wish all of the members of this Joint Assembly, all of those who are here in the room that have any responsibilities to state government, one way or another, a most happy and successful new year; a constructive new year.

Governor elect Tom and Mrs. Salmon, I suspect he knows he's about to take over, but do you know that it is the most lonesome job in the state of Vermont. I wish for you Tom every success, and I will help you every way I can for the State we love.

On that note, it is time at last for me to step down from this rostrum and the office I have been so honored to hold.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for having the priceless privilege of being with you, working with you, during these four years.

REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

Governor Deane, Thank you for the last four years. Thank you for a lifetime of service to Vermont, and may God be with you and Marjorie.

DISSOLUTION

The Governor was escorted to the Executive Chamber by the Committee appointed by the Chair.

The Joint Assembly dissolved.

RICHARD C. THOMAS
Secretary of State, Clerk