

Inaugural address
of
Thomas P. Salmon
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Inaugural Address

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Reverend Clergy, Mr. President Pro Tern, Mr. Chief Justice, Associate Justices of our Supreme Court. Governor Davis, Governor Hoff, members of this Joint General Assembly; fellow Vermonters and friends.

I have taken the oath of office as Governor in your presence as a sign of my covenant with you and with Almighty God to uphold our Constitution, to be true and faithful to the State of Vermont, to carry out his laws and to do equal right and justice to all.

The trust to which I am summoned by the choice of a free people is so awesome an undertaking as to change vanity into humility and pride into prayer.

Permit me then, as my first executive act, to ask you to bow your heads as I repeat a prayer, which, twenty years ago this very month, President Dwight D. Eisenhower uttered on the steps of our Nations Capitol.

“Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment, my future associates in the Executive Branch of Government join me in beseeching that thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng and their fellow citizens everywhere.

“Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race or calling.

“May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and thy glory. Amen”

In this chamber of so many, many pleasant memories, where I was privileged to serve four terms, mindful of my shortcomings as well as my strengths . . . I answer your call to service with an eager heart.

This is not a day of partisan celebration. It is a day of dedication and consecration . . . a day to examine what it is we are and what we hope to be.

This much we know, that gathered within the borders of Vermont is something truly unique. Some say it is the majesty of our snow-capped mountains; the crisp greenness of summer’s forests and meadows or the golden red of the hills when autumn comes. Others say that is a way of life, a way of looking at things. All these are a part of the magic that is Vermont. But, what is more, Vermont represents a soaring triumph of the human spirit.

No matter how severe the cold or how long absent the sun or how rocky the soil, Vermonters have persevered in their art and their labor. They have not only endured; they have created, and man is a little freer, a little more noble because of it.

Let those who do not understand us quickly come to know that we are the heirs of that resolute spirit . . . the trustees of Vermont’s air, earth and water . . . our environmental heritage . . . for generations yet to come and we shall not betray nor allow others to betray our birthright and our trust.

Governor Davis, we will always be indebted for your tireless efforts in the field of environmental conservation. To secure your place in history, we pledge to continue the great legacy you have left us. I know I speak for all the people of the State of Vermont when I say we wish you and Mrs. Davis Godspeed as you leave State Government.

Today marks an ending and a beginning to the course of State government. Let us chart this new course, mindful of the past but with an abiding faith in the future of our State based upon the strengths of our people and their demands for high standards of performance. Let us begin by stating some basic beliefs.

I believe that the bedrock of all legitimate authority is the free consent of the people and that you cannot exclude the people from their own government. For if their informed discretion is not allowed to govern then surely their ignorance will.

Let it be known, then that we seek no government by fiat but an open administration, openly attained committed always to fundamental proposition of the dignity and integrity of the individual.

I would have us raise patriotism, a genuine not a spurious love of state and country to its ancient and honorable level.

I would have us lower the din of partisan and party strife so that we can hear the people speak. We might just learn something.

In recent months I put before the people of our State an underlying theme entitled "Vermont for Vermonters." By this theme I did not mean that we are a state made up of recluses.

I tried to give voice the alarm of most Vermonters as they witness the wholesale assault on our land from without.

Our neighbors unable to resist the promise of development have been shortsighted on the problems development brings. They are now paying the Price.

Together we can eliminate many of the problems that have made some of our neighboring states practically ungovernable, for uncontrolled growth without planning results in burdening our local communities with problems that threaten their very existence and our individual destinies.

Let us tell the developers who are not interested in profiting Vermont, but making Vermont profit them, what I told them six months ago:

"We are not going to change our laws. . .

"They are going to have to change their ways."

Let us tell them, and let us tell the rest of the country right here and now:

"Vermont is not for sale!!"

Let me say that Act 250 is just a start. We must strengthen these laws and I call upon every Vermonter who wants to continue to hunt, fish, ski, hike and snowmobile to join with us in our efforts to protect these precious open lands.

Let me say departing from my text, Governor Davis, just last night, finding very little to do, I did do a cursory reading of the Land Use and Capability Plan, hot off the press. Let me say that I was deeply impressed with the tone of this document, which appears to give in your words to the General Assembly early this morning, a real and a positive sense of direction to our environmental mission. I will attempt to pick up where you left off.

For years we have been promoting Vermont as the beckoning country.

Would you believe . . . Vermont has been discovered?

Many people in surrounding states would like to live and work and play in Vermont.

The tourist industry has been good to us. It raises important revenues to support our needs. It will be encouraged.

But the opportunities for living and working in job-scarce Vermont should be geared to our present population. Many Vermonters are forced to live in substandard housing while a proliferation of chalets and condominiums are being built to satisfy the needs of visitors seeking second homes, and this is unacceptable and we're going to do something about it.

When I began my campaign last summer. . . I did one thing which, more than any other . . . helped bring me before you today.

I listened. I traveled around this State and listened to what our people were saying, and I based my campaign on what they were saying.

I did so because I believe that no less important than the citizen's right to speak is the office holder's duty to listen.

When I listened—do you know what I heard? I heard that the people want property tax relief now, not

two or three years from now, because in some cases it is already too late.

We have lost homesteads, farms and open lands to speculators because of intolerable pressure in the form of spiraling taxes.

We must, in my judgment, relate our property tax to ability to pay and use our revenue sharing funds to provide direct tax relief to our citizens while embarking on new and innovative approaches to correcting present inequities.

We will exact a high price from those who would place our heritage on the auction block.

My tax relief bill has already been distributed to all of you, and it differs little from the proposal I put before our people during the campaign.

If we enact this property tax relief plan during this session of the Legislature we will have achieved the major task Vermonters have given us.

To those who would inquire as to our attitude toward human needs and financial matters we say:

The new leadership will be both humanely and fiscally responsive which will become apparent as the executive budget unfolds.

Let us together perform the people's business with a minimum of partisan conflict.

The door to the Governor's office is open to all Legislators on both sides of the political aisle.

In closing, let me say: I have taken the oath of office today with my hand placed on the verse in the Holy Bible which asks:

“What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

This much I pledge to you the people of Vermont.

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR

Governor Salmon, we have heard your fair and generous words and will heed them. Speaking through the General Assembly for the people of Vermont, I say that we stand ready to serve the people with you from this moment forward.

BENEDICTION

Benediction was pronounced by Reverend Max H. Webster of Bennington.

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