

Farewell address

of

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Farewell Address

RETIRING MESSAGE

Thank you very much, Lieutenant Governor Hayes, Governor-elect Davis and Mrs. Davis, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tem, Members of the General Assembly, and my fellow Vermonters:

My appearance before you today is in accordance with what has been traditionally referred to as the outgoing Governor's farewell address. I, however, do not look upon this as a farewell in any sense of the word.

One thing that we all have come to realize is that no Vermonter can turn his back upon the affairs of this great state. I think of this citizen involvement . . . this public participation in government . . . as a vital feature of the years you and I have worked together in this, the peoples' house.

Six years ago, this Assembly and the people of Vermont joined me in a challenge to control change and not merely to react to it . . . in a challenge to shape our future and not merely to endure it . . . in a challenge to preserve the best of our rich heritage and not to squander it . . . and finally, in a challenge to mobilize our total resources for the benefit of all our citizens.

The challenge at that time was to design a bold departure from the past – a past worthy of honor and pride – but also a past that too often has been used as an excuse for public indifference and apathy.

Vermonters today have new reason to be proud of our heritage. Vermonters today, I believe, have a new sense of pride in our joint efforts to meet pressing public needs through revitalized governmental structures. Vermont has a new sense of confidence in its future.

No longer are Vermonters content to accept second best for themselves or for their children. No longer does Vermont see itself apart from the nation. Neither do we separate our aspirations as Vermonters from our aspirations as Americans.

I am convinced that this is because we have been challenged and because we have responded to that challenge with fresh inspiration and dedication to the public good.

Working together, we have moved our state forward, making significant progress in every area of social concern, political reform and economic development.

But this is not a time for accounting past accomplishments. Neither is it a time for judging the history of the immediate past. Rather, it is a time for facing the realities of the present and the opportunities of the future.

The present cannot be a plateau in the performance of public service. The future must be planned for and its promise realized through action now.

One need not dwell long on the events of the past few years to realize that the world did not stand still as Vermont moved ahead in revitalizing our welfare programs, in reforming our penal system, in modernizing the administration of justice and in improving the quality of education. But today's technology and social upheaval has made our progress relative rather than absolute.

We take great pride in the statistics of our expanded economic base. Yet we realize these statistics are of little value to the man out of work or the family without adequate housing.

The rewarding rise in personal income during the past few years gives us all new hope. But it is less significant to us as we view our public responsibilities than the specter of the man who still has not broken the cycle of poverty.

What comfort can we take in our expanded educational opportunities until we have assured every young Vermonter the opportunity to achieve his full academic potential regardless of his financial status or the geographic accident of his birth.

This we have come to realize and to make an integral part of our public lives. This, of course, is the idea that government is nothing more or less than individual citizens, on a one-man, one-vote basis, cooperating to meet needs that would not or could not be met otherwise.

Acceptance of this concept of government has been crucial to our progress as a state. It represents a sharp shift from past perceptions of government and its role in our society.

It was an essential factor in our move toward the regionalization of public services so necessary to balance public needs and resources required to meet them. It provides the philosophical and administrative base for future progress. It also assures us of realistic action to keep government as close to the people as possible.

Cooperative town action in the formation of union school districts has been matched by the regrouping of judicial and other services. This breaking down of artificial political boundaries has also breathed new vitality into the New England Governors' Conference and multi-state planning and economic development through the New England Regional Commission.

This departure from past modes of thought and action offers more promise for future progress than any other concept underlying our present social and political structure.

It has permeated every aspect of public service. It is as important to our highway program as is the very asphalt from which our roads are constructed. It is the essential element in making equality of educational opportunity a reality within the state.

It underscores our unity as a people and our identity with the problems of people through the nation. It is the hall mark of our willingness to replace shadow with substance and our concern for people rather than mere institutions.

The struggle to maintain this focus is a continuous one. It is made increasingly difficult by forces tending to polarize our society. It demands constant surveillance and determined dedication if we are not to be deterred from our goal of maintaining our basic unity as a state and as a nation.

There is evidence that social and political change moves in waves of progression and reaction. We must assure ourselves and future generations that the pendulum of progress never centers in the same place.

We cannot be content to mark on the treadmill of the status quo because to do so would be to lose ground already won.

This will also demand that we pay creative attention to the message of alienation sounded by our young people. They seek relevancy in our institutions and honesty and freedom from shame in our community values. Their message does not differ greatly from the idealism of other generations of young people. It has been intensified, however, by our new affluence, by the faceless threat of nuclear war, and the computer complexion of so many lives.

Vermont stands out in the vale of violence as a green – even if snow-covered – oasis. The warmth of its people, the beauty of its landscape, its traditional concern for human rights, make it in my judgment unique.

This very uniqueness is a constant challenge. It demands that we adapt to the world of today in such a way that our move for progress does not jeopardize the values we already enjoy.

Yet today's world demands rephrasing the questions we ask ourselves just as much as it demands new solutions to lingering social problems.

Can we, for example, escape questioning the values which permit us to deface and debase our ever-shrinking landscape in the name of uncontrolled economic enterprise?

We must redefine individual freedom and community responsibility. This has tremendous implications in terms of our total tax structure, our educational and welfare programs, just as it does in the areas of water and air pollution.

Past yardsticks for progress are no longer adequate. We must determine a new social balance sheet with which to assess the true human condition.

Freedom today is certainly the single most important goal of our state and our nation. We have finally come to realize that a man is not free if his children have access to less than a first-class education.

We have agreed as a matter of public policy that a man is not free if his brother is not free.

Freedom is not the mere absence of restraint – it is the ability and the capacity to choose among meaningful alternative each of which assures a creative and secure life.

If this is our vision and we pursue it with vigor and vitality, I foresee continued progress in our state and nation.

We have the means, the talent, the resources, to assure every Vermonter a new dimension of freedom. We need only the will and the determination to take full advantage of our opportunity.

The spirit of adventure so strong in man's reach for the moon must be injected into our efforts to improve the lives of our citizens.

Our nation's science and technology has been successful because of our willingness to venture from the known to the unknown, our willingness to challenge old concepts, and to experiment with new ways of doing things.

It is my hope that we will apply this same daring to our efforts to assure this new dimension of freedom for every man.

State government has responded to the quickened tempo of change. Our efforts must be intensified if we are to keep pace. This must be done despite cries that our stride has been too great, our pace too brisk, our step too bold.

Once again, I see it essential to suggest that we no longer procrastinate in strengthening our ability to come to grips with contemporary problems through public action. Such fundamental areas of concern as constitutional reform, governmental reorganization, conservation, educational services and taxation cannot be ignored.

At times, progress in these and other vital areas has been hampered by political expediency. But these are not partisan concepts. They are the tools necessary if our system of government is to bring out the very best that is in our people.

The deficiencies in the structure of state government, for example, have long been visible. They stand as a barricade to our progress as a state. Additional reorganization of the executive branch will strengthen our ability to meet urgent public needs. It will also give the people new confidence in the institutions which they control.

Our private institutions have prospered these past few years as never before in our history. If this growth is to continue, public services must be revised drastically.

Private effectiveness and public inefficiency cannot be tolerated side by side any more than we can ignore private affluence and poverty existing side by side.

When our public institutions languish, the private sector of our economy curiously is the first to suffer.

The investment in new schools, new pollution-abatement facilities, highways and public buildings must not lag if the buoyancy of our economy is to be maintained.

Public investment is crucial to private prosperity – investment in our human and natural resources is essential if we are to continue to build a better society.

We know, for example, that almost five thousand new public school classrooms will be needed in Vermont by the year 1975.

We know that highways will have to be constructed to link the major population centers not being served by our interstate system.

We know that more than six hundred new hospital beds must be available in Vermont within the next six years.

We know that at least thirteen thousand new housing units will be needed in six years, exclusive of housing for the poor, the elderly, and the handicapped.

Our educational system must be broadened to offer optimum opportunity for all students. This should include fourteen years of publicly sponsored and publicly financed education to all who qualify.

These examples merely illustrate the relative nature of progress and our continuing responsibilities as Vermont as your Governor these past six years. I am grateful to the people of Vermont for that opportunity. I look upon these years, quite honestly, as the most rewarding of my life. I hope that every Vermonter today shares my pride in our state and its willingness to forge a better life for its citizens.

As I look about his chamber I see the faces of persons I have enjoyed working with and indeed a few who have been largely in opposition to my view of the state and the nation.

But I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my appreciation for the sincerity and dedication to Vermont of every person in this assemblage.

It is with humility, with hope, and confidence in our state and its people that I say thank you, both on behalf of myself and my wife, and wish each of you every good fortune. Thank you.

HOWARD E. ARMSTRONG
Secretary of State, Clerk