

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS
OF
LAWRENCE DOUGLAS WILDER**

**GOVERNOR
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AND
THE PEOPLE OF VIRGINIA
NORTH LAWN, STATE CAPITOL
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**Inaugural Address to the General Assembly
and to the People of Virginia
January 13, 1990
North Lawn, State Capitol
Richmond, Virginia
By
Governor Lawrence Douglas Wilder**

Mr. Justice Powell, Mr. Justice Carrico, to the Lieutenant Governor, to the Attorney General, members of the General Assembly, distinguished guests, family and friends, and my fellow Virginians, we gather here today for what is both a culmination and a continuation of the democratic process.

Four years ago, I stood on this spot to assume the second highest office in the Commonwealth. Today, because of your faith in our efforts, I stand before you as Chief Executive of this state. And now—in keeping with the sanctioned privilege extended to all Governors—it is my honor to address the people of this Commonwealth, and to express to my fellow citizens the profound gratitude and deep sense of purpose that I feel in fulfilling your expectations.

Candor and honesty would have me admit to you that I was not blessed with the foresight to know that this moment was in the offing when I stood here in 1985. Having been tested in the political crucible of trial and cross-examination, I have been rendered a verdict by having had delivered unto me the greatest outpouring of votes ever accorded any candidate for this great office. For that, I shall be eternally grateful. And—be assured—I shall demonstrate that gratitude during the next four years by being a Governor who will be beholden to but one special interest: the welfare of Virginians, all Virginians.

But my gratitude is not of such recent origin. It is said “To whom much is given, much shall be expected.” I will be the first to admit that I have been the beneficiary of much through no endeavors of my own. While I have indeed worked hard and performed to the best of my abilities, I have also had a few breaks along the way.

Indeed, in every walk—in every period of my life—there have been many more deserving and justly entitled to the fruits that wholesome opportunities present. And yet, for many, those chances never came and the bell of fulfillment never tolled for them. Providence indeed has directed my course. And I shall remain ever mindful of my good fortune.

In recent years, Virginia too has been blessed with good fortune. The progress and the prosperity we have enjoyed during this period has enabled us to reclaim the respected achievements of times past.

In looking to our accomplishments in education, economic development, the environment, employment, housing, or transportation, we find that Virginia ranks among those states in the vanguard of forward looking movement. Not surprisingly, the ensuing pride in seeing our state climb in rank among our sister states in the nation and in preeminence among the Southern states, cause Virginians everywhere to feel good about our cause, our mission, and our success in forging Virginia's New Mainstream.

That commitment to looking ahead and not behind—of building rather than destroying; of bringing people together rather than pitting them against each other—also calls for me to address you with measured sobriety in facing conditions in the Commonwealth today, and I will comment further in that regard when I address the General Assembly on Monday.

But for this moment, let me assure you that I do not intend to participate in bringing to a halt the momentum to which people of Virginia have grown accustomed, supported and enjoyed.

Cicero in parting observation, noted that, “A Commonwealth is not any collection of human beings...but an assembly of people joined in agreement on justice and partnership for the common good, and a community where civility must reign and all must live peacefully together.” And we know what happened to Cicero's Rome which could not pass on the heritage of its past to the people of its future. But we have done so; we can do so. And we shall do so.

These are times when the people of our state and of our country can feel the resurgence of the dominance of the individual spirit which proves daily to be unconquerable. Whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores where tyranny once ruled, and we are redeemed in our deeply held and treasured beliefs in the development of the high possibility of every individual who breathes the sweetness of liberty's air.

At this time—and in the place where so many great names in American history have trod—we renew this celebration of freedom in the full and certain knowledge that with it comes great responsibility.

Without question, much tighter economic times which loom in the days ahead will test to the fullest our ability to make hard decisions, to lead, and to govern.

But progress will be possible.

Opportunity can be expanded.

Freedom can be increased.

Resources employed in the past for the finer things in life can be—and will have to be—deployed for the more serious of our needs.

For we know that freedom is but a word for the man or woman who needs and cannot find a job.

Freedom—as it has been written—is a dream deferred when it “Dries up like a raisin in the sun, and stinks like rotten meat.”

Freedom is meaningless when a woman’s right to choose is regulated outside the dictates of her own faith and conscience.

Freedom is impotent when there is intolerance to those who hold moral and political beliefs different from our own.

Freedom is restricted when labor and management cannot reach agreements.

Freedom is impossible for the uneducated who try to live in today’s complex world.

Freedom is restrained for business and industry when our network of transportation is allowed to deteriorate.

Freedom for the police is denied when their resources are unduly limited.

Freedom for the people is assaulted when lawful authority is abused.

Freedom for the next generation is mortgaged when we destroy our environment.

And—as has been proven throughout recorded history—freedom is no where to be found when the people are overtaxed and over-regulated.

As we salute the idea of freedom today, let us pledge to extend that same freedom to others tomorrow.

Let us fulfill the perfect promise of freedom and liberty left as a legacy for us by those who founded this Commonwealth.

And let us likewise be thankful that—while our country gave birth to a freedom long denied and delayed for all who loved freedom—the belief in these dreams held by those forebears was passed from generation to generation, and spawned the seeds that propagated the will and the desire to achieve.

We are on hallowed ground today, and the steps we take from this place must be steps of honor. The words we issue must be words of wisdom. The laws we pass must be laws of mercy and justice. And the faith we possess must be true to the Almighty.

In meeting these challenges—and they will be difficult—I ask your help and that of God. I do not shrink from the enormity of the task. In six million Virginians, there is endless courage and enormous strength—in the coming years, we will need it all.

As we all know, as complexities of human relationships increase, the power to govern them also increases. The proper use of that power must always be subordinated to the public good and that shall be uppermost in the hearts and minds of those to whom those powers are justly delegated by the people.

We shall not pause; we shall not rest upon laurels. For we have not fulfilled our destinies.

In the coming years, we must persist and make every citizen of our Commonwealth the subject of our interest and concern. We must insist that every agency of our government utilize every proper and effective instrument to carry out the will of the people—for, as with any democracy, . . . the will of the people is supreme.

An administration can only be effective when it works for the people...all of the people. Our prosperity can continue only if our leaders and private citizens alike stay constantly advised of all of the relevant facts.

In turn, we can expect to receive your support—as well as your constructive criticism—when you receive true information from those of us who serve as your trustees.

I am undaunted by that which lies ahead, as we have shown at other points in our history what we can accomplish when we fearlessly face the future. We have—and we shall—shun the defects of destruction, and shall work to achieve the highest degree of improvement in our status of which we are capable.

We have a common concern, and we share the responsibility. I see a Virginia of hope and happiness, of mothers and fathers building and nurturing families in those hearthstones where the cradle of childhood is rocked with wholesome expectation for the future—a future in which an education is within intellectual and financial reach; a future in which adequate and affordable housing is possible; a future in which nothing is impossible.

I see a place where crime is not only reduced and our streets and neighborhoods are safe, but the root-causes thereof— illiteracy, poverty, joblessness—are stamped out.

I see a Virginia where the homeless can find shelter; where hunger cannot and does not stalk those unable to fend for themselves.

We must set priorities in the coming years.

Specifically, we must be partners in working toward a revived economy—a healthy and thriving economy that provides equal opportunity for all Virginians. While the flow may have slowed, Virginia's New Mainstream is far from drying up. It shall be the task of this administration to ensure that a rising tide of prosperity and opportunity is possible in the future.

Some describe conditions in our Commonwealth today in dismal terms. And yet, one must question the resolve and the reserve of those who are not called upon to make sacrifices greater than those who have preceded us.

Despite our economic slowdown, we are living in the best of times. And they can be even better. And they will be better.

If you will forgive me...a moment of nostalgia...

We mark today not a victory of party or the accomplishments of an individual, but the triumph of an idea—an idea as old as America; as old as the God who looks out for us all.

It is the idea expressed so eloquently from this great Commonwealth by those who gave shape to the greatest nation ever known...Jefferson, Madison, Mason, and their able colleagues.

...The idea . . . that all men and women are created equal;

...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights;

...the right to life . . . liberty, . . . and the pursuit of happiness.

...The idea that shows forth in the concepts of freedom and opportunity—not only in Virginia—but more recently in the fresh, new winds of Eastern Europe and the tumult of Panama.

If these words about freedom are to be heard at all today, I hope they will be heard by the young people of this Commonwealth. I want them to know:

...that oppression can be lifted;

...that discrimination can be eliminated;

...that poverty need not be binding;

...that disability can be overcome;

...And that offer of opportunity in a free society carries with it the requirement of hard work, the rejection of drugs and other false highs, and a willingness to work with others whatever their color or national origin.

We have come far, but we have far to go.

We have done much, but we have much to do.

I ask for your energy; for your understanding; for your dedication; for your patience; and—yes—for your prayers.

Four years ago, I said to the people of Virginia that I was proud to be a Virginian. I did not think then that my pride could possibly be greater. And—in theory—it isn't.

But in reality, that pride does burst forth, and lifts my voice and my spirit to proclaim, "I am a son of Virginia."

I thank you all. And may God be ever with us.

