

GOVERNOR TIMOTHY M. Kaine

Inaugural Address 2006



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Inaugural Address

Governor Timothy M. Kaine

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Colonial Capitol
Williamsburg, Virginia

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Mr. President Pro Tem, Members of the General Assembly, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the Supreme Court, Mr. Attorney General, ladies and gentlemen:

I am humbled by the trust you have placed in me. With the support of God and my family, I pledge my energy and enthusiasm to the mission of serving this Commonwealth.

I salute with great respect our dear friend Governor Mark Warner, and I ask that all Virginians join me in showing their public appreciation for his outstanding leadership.

I congratulate Lieutenant Governor Bolling, Attorney General McDonnell and all the members of the General Assembly who have stepped forward to offer their talents to advance our common good.

This is a glorious day – the weather is to remind us not to take ourselves too seriously. And how far Virginia has come since we last gathered for an inauguration in Williamsburg!

Patrick Henry was sworn in here as the newly-formed Commonwealth's first Governor in 1776 and, three years later, Thomas Jefferson followed in his footsteps. Henry and Jefferson stood here in the midst of a war raging on our country's soil, a war that threatened the very existence of Virginia and our young nation.

They stood here at a time, just as today, when Virginians serving freedom's cause sacrificed their lives so that democracy could prevail over tyranny. They stood here proclaiming the Promise of Virginia, when the world around them doubted that the land of their vision would survive.

Could Henry or Jefferson have imagined the powerful success of their democratic experiment, their beloved Virginia, as it appears today? As a people, we have come through storm after storm, working out the meaning of our own destiny and coming closer and closer to the Virginia ideal of equality that Jefferson articulated in America's Declaration of Independence.

As we stand here now, our hearts should be filled with the magnitude of the debt we owe to the generations of leaders – the celebrated and the unknown – who fought and worked to create our Commonwealth. The Promise of Virginia is bright today because of their efforts, and it is up to us to carry the work forward for future generations.

Today's ceremony honors and renews that experiment, and continues the promise that Virginia – which has so often led our nation through the past four centuries – will continue to lead our nation in the 21st century. And we will lead, we will keep the Promise of Virginia bright, if we stay true to the best values that have guided our first 400 years.

First, we reaffirm the necessity of courage. This is the defining trait of those who came to Virginia aboard the Discovery, Godspeed and Susan Constant, landing just a few miles from this place at Jamestown Island in 1607. They knew that earlier efforts, by the Spanish and English, to establish

settlements in this region had ended in disaster. But they crossed treacherous seas to arrive at a new world because they understood the need to do and to dare. Their survival and success depended upon bold leadership. We must be equally bold to tackle the challenges of our day.

Second, we acknowledge that individual opportunity is the most powerful engine of progress.

The first English settlers came as part of a commercial venture, the Virginia Company, seeking economic riches in the New World. Others came seeking the opportunity to worship as they pleased or to trade away an aristocracy of birth for an aristocracy of merit. When individuals have the opportunity to set their own purpose, and determine the bar for their own achievements, they are able to harness their God-given talents and ensure our economic and social success.

And third, we recognize that our destiny is a shared destiny and that our commitment to community is a condition of our advancement. Our Virginia might not exist today were it not for the generosity extended to those first settlers by the native Virginia tribes living in this region. Without the hospitality of Chief Powhatan or the compassion of Pocahontas, those in Jamestown would have perished. Throughout Virginia's history, we have succeeded only when we have welcomed all to the table of Thanksgiving.

That same sense of community is required of us today. We must include all Virginians in our efforts. We should continue to welcome newcomers to this Commonwealth and nation, just as Chief Powhatan did 400 years ago.

Hemos venido hoy día, a este lugar para recordar la promesa de nuestros antepasados. Como gobernador, seré justo e incluyente de todas las comunidades, con la certeza que juntos lograremos construir un mejor futuro para Virginia. [We have come here today to remember the promise made by our forefathers. As Governor, I will be fair and inclusive of all communities with the certainty that together we can achieve a better future in Virginia.]

And, we should use this historic time to help those who first helped us by working with the federal government to see that Virginia's native Indian tribes are finally recognized.

Our challenges today are different than those faced by the Jamestown settlers, or the first Virginia governors. But they require fidelity to the same values. We may not have new geographic worlds to discover, but there are still worlds of research and knowledge, of information and creativity, of commerce and service, of reconciliation and brotherhood, that await our exploration.

To keep the Promise of Virginia, to succeed, we will embrace our best, historic values and we will work together. Ours will be a non-partisan, Virginia agenda that includes all. At the heart of what I pledge to you today is the desire to keep Virginia moving forward.

To the people of Virginia: I pledge an administration that will keep the Promise of Virginia strong. An administration guided by the Virginia values of courage, opportunity and community. We will lead boldly and manage wisely; we will protect the liberties endowed by our Creator; we will affirm that family and faith is our bedrock, hard work our way and education our path to progress. When we are true to that promise, we will succeed and truly honor the legacy we inherit.

To the parents of Virginia: I pledge that our top priority will be raising the focus of our public education system from competence to excellence.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that progress depends on the broadest possible diffusion of knowledge among the entire population. More than ever, we are now in a position to provide all children with the opportunity to learn and fulfill their God-given potential. And we acknowledge that lifelong learning – from the expansion of early childhood education to world-class higher education, and beyond – is our Commonwealth's top priority.

To the taxpayers of Virginia: I pledge that we will always remember that what government spends is not its money. It's your money. We will place a premium on accountability; ensuring that your dollars are used responsibly in meeting the priorities that we share.

To those who commute and travel in Virginia: I pledge that my administration will begin immediately and work urgently to address the transportation dilemma that complicates our lives and threatens our prosperity. Together, let us find answers through a dialogue that is shaped not simply in terms of dollars and cents, but also by new solutions and common sense. A lack of coordination and planning has us stuck where we are today. Let it not be fear and politics that leaves us stranded here.

To the working families of Virginia and those that employ them: I pledge an administration focused on fostering opportunity and encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit; an administration focused on ensuring that every hard-working Virginian – no matter where they live – has access to a good paying job to provide for their family.

We will also work with you to find solutions to the problem of accessible, affordable health care; a burden that is overwhelming working families, small businesses and government budgets.

To those who protect us, our guardsmen, law enforcement officers, firefighters and EMTs: I pledge an administration that will work to ensure you have the resources and the support you need to keep our families and neighborhoods safe. The work you do is dangerous and essential. And we salute your dedication.

To those who serve in local governments: I pledge an administration that is a good partner with a focus on cooperation and collaboration. The people we serve are the same people you serve. When we work together, we serve them better.

To those who love Virginia's natural beauty: I pledge an administration that will be a good steward of Virginia's blessings of natural beauty. Our natural resources are essential to both our way of life and our ability to make a living. The streams we fish, the trails we hike, the fields that we harvest and the hills that we hunt with our children today must be protected for them and their children tomorrow.

And to the children of Virginia: I pledge an administration that will do its all to leave you with a Commonwealth greater than the one we found; filled with opportunities, greater than those of our dreams; a Commonwealth where the Promise of Virginia rings true for every son and daughter.

I seek the help of all Virginians – regardless of party or region, race or religion – in keeping the promise of Virginia.

Let us rise to the leadership example of Virginia's first four hundred years. Let us affirm and carry forward our values of courage, opportunity and community.

Let us remember that civility is not a sign of weakness – that cooperation and compromise are necessary for progress and for the sensible solutions we can all embrace to keep the promise of Virginia strong. Under God's hand, we have thrived. If we stay faithful to our history, we will succeed.

Let us work together.

Let us begin.