

GOVERNOR TERENCE R. MCAULIFFE

Inaugural Address 2014



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Governor Terence R. McAuliffe

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As Prepared for Delivery

Mr. Speaker, Lt. Governor Northam, Attorney General Herring, Members of the General Assembly, Justices of the Supreme Court, guests from across our Commonwealth and nation, my fellow Virginians: It is humbling, and the highest honor of my life, to stand before you today.

It is humbling because of the responsibility that you have given me, and because of the history and tradition of where we stand.

While makeshift, the Virginia State Capitol first came to Richmond in 1780 at the urging of Thomas Jefferson – during the height of the American Revolution.

Through the courage and sacrifice of so many who came before us, our Commonwealth survived the Revolution. Freedom was born. Tyranny was defeated. And a permanent Capitol was constructed here in Richmond.

This Capitol, where I stand today, reminds us not only of the durability of Virginia, but of what Virginia overcame.

While often too slowly – together we overcame the evils of slavery, Civil War, and segregation.

Now, more than 200 years later, Virginia has grown stronger than ever.

Relative to the nation, we've emerged from the Great Recession with an economy more resilient than many of our sister states.

We are a stronger Commonwealth because our leaders have wisely invested in superior public schools for our children.

We are one of the best states to do business because we have worked together to minimize regulations and keep taxes low.

Our colleges and universities are models for the nation because there is bipartisan consensus in Richmond that higher education drives long-term, innovative growth.

And Virginia is the national model for fiscal discipline because our leaders – leaders like Governor Doug Wilder, decided long ago to put the common good ahead of short-term politics.

That's the Virginia way – it's a tradition that we should be proud of.

But it is also a tradition that must be sustained through constant work by leaders who choose progress over ideology.

Common ground doesn't move towards us, we move towards it.

On behalf of all Virginians, I want to thank Governor Bob McDonnell for his leadership during the last four years.

Governor McDonnell has provided for the smoothest transition imaginable, and I am grateful to him for that.

He and Lieutenant Governor Bolling will long be remembered for their leadership on transportation – not just for the policy accomplishment, but for the manner in which it was achieved.

It was an approach that built consensus worthy of the Virginia way.

It's the same approach taken by Governor Warner to save our triple A bond rating while investing in education, and by Governor Kaine who prudently guided our Commonwealth through the great recession.

But as we celebrate our past, the truth is that we still face serious economic headwinds over the course of the next four years.

And, like four years ago, the skeptics are predicting divided government driven to gridlock by partisanship.

Virginia, together, we will prove them wrong again.

As Virginians, the spirit of service is built into the fabric of our communities.

We were home to so many of the founders who sacrificed their lives to build a nation based on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And now today, Virginia is home to so many who serve to protect those everlasting rights. Join me in recognizing them and their families.

I remember growing up, hearing stories of sacrifice from my father who served in World War II. These are the same stories that Virginians hear every night from parents and grandparents – and from brothers and sisters returning home now.

We will honor their sacrifice by ensuring that they have access to the education, health care, and career opportunities they deserve.

Our servicemen and women have the technical training our innovative industries demand, and they embody that strong sense of teamwork, leadership, and drive that make them valuable assets to our workforce. That is why we need to make it easier for them to get good jobs when they come back home.

Our 23 community colleges have and will continue to play a major part in this effort. They are our workforce development engines, and over the past year, I visited each and every one of them across the state.

They are preparing our students for the jobs available today and equipping them with the knowledge and skills for the emerging industries of tomorrow.

With a community college within 30 miles of every single Virginian, they are the key to attracting and keeping the industries of the future across the Commonwealth— from Arlington to Abingdon; Luray to Lunenburg.

But, in order to do that, we must work to reduce unnecessary mandates and achieve adequate funding.

We must also recognize that Virginians have placed great trust in us and expect transparency, and decision-making that avoids improper conflicts. That is why I will sign an executive order later today imposing a strict limit on gifts on myself and the members of my administration.

I commend the members of the General Assembly from both parties who are making significant steps forward on this issue, and I will ask the entire General Assembly to enact the strongest possible new ethics rules to hold all Virginia elected officials to the highest of standards.

While there is a fierce debate on health care in Washington DC, the choice we face here in Virginia is simpler.

Like the majority of other states — we need to act on the consensus of the business community and health care industry to accept funding that will expand health care coverage, save rural hospitals, and spur job creation.

With a stronger health care system in Virginia as our objective, I will work with the legislature to build on the Medicaid reforms that the General Assembly has already achieved, and to put Virginians' own tax dollars to work keeping families healthy and creating jobs here in the Commonwealth.

Finally, the greatest policy challenge we face is diversifying Virginia's economy in the face of inevitable federal spending cuts and heightened competition from abroad.

Mr. Speaker and members of the General Assembly, as we begin this term together, know that my top priority will be to lay the groundwork for a diverse and growing economy in every region of the Commonwealth.

And I know it is your top priority as well.

Diversifying Virginia's economy can seem abstract – especially when the true benefits may be felt years down the road.

But over the past four years I've traveled to every corner of the Commonwealth, and met hard working Virginians who are struggling to provide for their families, unable to access the quality

education and training they need to get good-paying jobs, or even worried about just providing healthy meals for their children.

When you think about those Virginians, you realize that the decisions we make over the next four years will determine:

Whether parents who worked hard their entire life will have the savings to retire with some security.

Whether the brave men and women who return home from serving abroad can find work or start their own businesses.

Whether children who grow up in rural Virginia can live, work and thrive in the communities where they were born.

And it will determine whether another kid from a middle class family can find enough customers for his driveway maintenance business to help pay for college.

As the legislature and my administration work to diversify our economy, we need to remember that our sense of urgency is driven by those Virginians who struggle each and every day to get by – and whose dream is simply to give their children the opportunities that they may never have had.

My administration will work tirelessly to ensure that those opportunities are equal for all of Virginia's children –

No matter if you're a girl or a boy,
No matter what part of the Commonwealth you live in,
No matter your race or religion,
And no matter whom you love.

There is still work to do to.

We must work to ensure that the children of new immigrants to Virginia have equal educational opportunities.

To ensure that someone can't lose a job simply because they are gay.

And to ensure that every woman has the right to make her own personal health care decisions.

An open and welcoming state is critical in a 21st Century economy. But, it is also an imperative for justice and fairness – values I learned from Jack and Millie McAuliffe.

While we grew up in a middle class family, my brothers and I were always reminded of the struggles of those less fortunate – and our obligation to do something about it.

It's that same message that has guided Dorothy and me as we've raised our five children in Fairfax County over the last 21 years. And as our children have grown, they've constantly impressed us with their dedication to service and improving the lives of others.

It's also those values that shaped me as a person and drove my decision to run for Governor.

In four years, we will all gather again here at Jefferson's capitol to welcome the next Governor of the Commonwealth.

When she or he takes the oath of office, I am confident that they will begin to lead a Commonwealth with broader economic opportunity and growing 21st Century industries.

They will lead a Commonwealth that has expanded our advantages in pre K-12 education, workforce development and higher education.

They will lead a Commonwealth that has maintained a reputation for strong fiscal management.

They will lead a Commonwealth that strives to keep all of its families healthy.

They will lead a Commonwealth that never stands still on the road to greater equality for all our people.

And they will lead a Commonwealth that has delivered those results in a manner worthy of the Virginia way.

The impediments to consensus are well known: ideology, personal political ambition, partisanship or score-settling. Identifying the roadblocks is not a challenge.

What is hard is having the humility to admit that each of us has allowed these impediments to influence our decisions.

And even more challenging is having the foresight to put them aside for the greater good.

As I said on election night, the test of my commitment to finding common ground in Virginia will not be a speech at an inauguration; it will be my actions in office. And I expect those who did not support me in November to hold me to my word.

No one who has served as an elected official has looked back and wished they had been more rigid, more ideological or more partisan.

And long after giving up elected office –describing himself as quote “near the end of my voyage” - Thomas Jefferson wrote from Monticello, “A government held together by the bands of reason only, requires much compromise of opinion.”

Mr. Speaker, Delegates and Senators, these next four years will be our moment to again show Americans what can be accomplished by mainstream leaders, and to show Virginians that we will live up to their expectation of consensus-driven progress.

In Washington today, that talk of consensus can seem quaint, illusory or even naïve.

But in Virginia, political progress in divided government is a tradition that we must continue.

I will work to live up to that tradition.

Now, I begin serving with humility to the accomplishments of my predecessors and gratitude to the people of Virginia.

Thank you and may God bless the Commonwealth of Virginia.

