

Farewell address

of

Joseph B. Johnson

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Farewell Address

Retiring Message

*Mr. President, Members of the Joint Assembly
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

There apparently has been a practice of long standing that the retiring governor, before leaving office, should present a message to the members of the General Assembly. I appreciate your action in inviting me to appear before you at this time. While there certainly can be some value in trying, from four years' experience as Chief Executive of the State, to point out the accomplishments of lasting value to the people of the State, I will try not to trespass greatly on the prerogatives of my successor who will this afternoon give you his Inaugural Message with recommendations for your guidance in the deliberations of the Session.

The authority of a governor of Vermont is rather vague in many respects. The office, of course, carries certain prestige and influence, but if it were not for the cooperation of other State officials, elected and appointed, and members of boards and commissions, department heads and employees generally, not much could be accomplished. So, at this time, I wish to express my very deep appreciation to my many associates in State service who have helped me so greatly during the past four years. I wish particularly to thank the members of my staff in the Executive Office for their always efficient and valuable help. Vermont is fortunate indeed in that its officials, both elected and appointed, are not merely political figureheads, but actually work full time on the job, being dedicated and skillful executives and administrators. The people of the State of Vermont benefit greatly not only from the work of these full-time officials, but from the contributions of many men and women of integrity and ability who are willing to accept appointments to boards and commissions, with little or no remuneration.

In this age of rapid communications it is, of course, important that information on the activities of their government officials and agencies be promptly and accurately given to the people. I wish also to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the members of the press, radio and television services. While it would be too much to expect that a governor would never be irked at the press reports, I am glad to state at this time that I feel, everything considered, that I have been very well treated in the publicity that has had to deal with the Executive Department. I have enjoyed the friendly relations with the hard-working reporters who, I am convinced, try to do their job honestly and sincerely.

Four years ago and two years ago when I appeared before the General Assembly on occasions similar to this, my Inaugural Messages naturally were pointed more toward the future. Today, for a few moments it seems important that I emphasize some of the accomplishments during my four-year administration. Of course, I do not claim that I am responsible for all that has happened during this period, since many of the programs were well started under previous governors. In the final analysis, the direction and extent of our government activities were determined by the members of the Legislature through the laws which they enacted including appropriation of funds.

We are all conscious of the greatly increased expenditures by State Government, especially in the last fifteen years. There, of course, has been a definite trend in Vermont as elsewhere, to shift the payment for services from local governments to State Government. This was to be expected from the changes in our manner of living, especially in transportation, and in shifting from a rural economy to one where more and more people are supported through industry of one form or another. Speaking broadly, I can state that during this period of expansion of State activities, the people of Vermont have really received good value in return for their tax money.

While we have to carry on normal routine activities of government, a large part of our expense has actually been an investment in the future, as I will attempt to show in referring to the activities of some of our State departments. Time will not permit me to go into much detail or even mention every important contribution to

the future of our State, but I do wish to emphasize that we definitely on many fronts have been planning for the future.

EDUCATION

In the field of education, Vermont has made remarkable strides forward in the last four years. Up to this point, at least we have been able to pay our way and I believe our young people have benefited greatly. The services of the Department of Education to local school districts in improving the curriculum and instruction have been materially strengthened. With the help of Department leadership, teachers in many parts of the state are working out better materials and methods for instructing their pupils. Carrying on the state-aid for school construction program, begun in 1953, we have assisted materially in the construction of nearly thirty million dollars' worth of new school buildings in Vermont. Teachers' salaries have been raised with State assistance to a level where we no longer have a serious problem of losing our teachers to other states. Whereas the average salary of all principals and all teachers in the State in 1955 was only \$3,180, today it is over \$4,100 and will continue to rise.

The Legislature of 1955 cleared up the status of the University of Vermont so it is now definitely an instrumentality of the State with a majority of its trustees being elected by the Legislature or appointed by the Governor. Our teachers colleges have been expanded and I hope soon will be able to offer general two- and four-year courses beyond the high school level in order to serve the needs of more Vermonters.

The New England Board of Higher Education, representing the six State Universities in New England, was established in 1955 under the New England Higher Education Compact which was approved by the Congress in 1954. Under this cooperative plan, during the past year, \$65,000 was distributed to the region's medical and dental schools. The University of Vermont College of Medicine has already benefited financially. Final arrangements among the six State Universities were completed during the past year to institute this plan which makes available a wider variety of educational opportunities to New England's young people. They may now enroll at other state universities in certain regional programs not offered at their own state universities. As regional students, they enjoy special consideration for admission and pay only the in-state or resident fee. Unnecessary duplication is avoided by sharing the specialized facilities and staff required by such programs as social work, dairy manufacturing, pulp and paper technology, landscape architecture, hotel administration, pharmacy, law, and others.

HIGHWAYS

Undoubtedly the most significant development, and certainly the one most obvious, is the progress which we have made in bringing our high way system up to date. To do this necessitated departing from the Vermont tradition of financing highway improvements on a "pay-as-you-go" basis. Two successive Legislatures have approved the bonding programs which I recommended to step up the highway construction program. The results can be found in every section of Vermont today.

Our highway network is a sound investment in the future of our State, It is one of our greatest selling points in our efforts to bring industry and tourists into the State and to transport our valuable agricultural products where they can be sold, especially in the metropolitan markets. It is hoped that progress on the new interstate system and the rebuilding of other important Vermont highways will be continued at the fastest pace which can be soundly financed. Our Highway Board and Highway Department are to be commended for the manner in which they have met the challenge of extensive and rapid expansion.

POWER

Equally as important to the future development of the State, I believe, is the progress we have made during the last four years in the acquisition of an additional supply of electric power. It is not only the fact that we have this additional power today which is of such great importance to our future, but the fact that we also have transmission facilities available to receive more power from every direction.

In the past, Vermont, with relatively little firm all-year water power, had to rely on acquiring its electricity largely from sources to the east of us. Today, with a properly engineered grid system built throughout the State,

we are in a position to acquire electric power in the future from every direction: north, south, east and west. This in itself puts Vermont in a most enviable position for the future, not only for building up our industry, but in taking care of the increasing demand from our household and agricultural users. When power from atomic energy becomes commercially feasible, we shall be in a position to take full advantage of it.

It is a fact, also, that today we are receiving low-cost St. Lawrence electric power which no other New England state has been able to obtain and we are doing so at savings which will be passed on to the public. Several legislatures in their wisdom decided that this power development should be handled by private enterprise rather than through state ownership. The Legislature also asserted that our Public Service Commission should negotiate with the New York State Power Authority for St. Lawrence electric power and be responsible for a proper state distribution system. The members of the Public Service Commission and their staff have accomplished this task with outstanding success against many difficult and trying circumstances. I congratulate them for their efforts in behalf of the people of Vermont.

AGRICULTURE

One of the outstanding achievements of the State Government in agriculture during the present administration has been reducing the incidence of Brucellosis in Vermont to less than one per cent of the cow population. On August 19, 1957, Vermont was classified as a modified-certified Brucellosis free area. We were the ninth state to receive this recognition. Since 1957 we have demonstrated that the present program will hold Brucellosis at this low level.

The policy question now arises—is a control program good enough for this great dairy state, that is striving to expand markets for Vermont milk and cattle, or should we attempt to secure full eradication? Control involves continued cost to Vermont taxpayers. If eradication can be attained costs would be substantially reduced. It would appear to be in the public interest to make every reasonable effort to eradicate this devastating disease which has a direct bearing on human health as well as the future of our great dairy industry.

During the present administration, the Vermont Milk Control Board has by low-cost, conservative action established minimum prices which have enabled competition to operate above these floor levels in the Vermont retail milk market. This has prevented disastrous price wars which can tend to create monopoly but still has enabled Vermont consumers to secure top quality milk at reasonable prices. One hour's average industry pay will now buy seven quarts of milk; just previous to World War I the same hour's pay would buy only three-and-a-half quarts of milk.

Farm bulk milk tanks are rapidly changing the methods of handling milk, On December 1, 1958, we had 2,000 tanks in operation. There are approximately 9,000 commercial dairy farmers in Vermont. Many country milk plants are being closed. This is part of the great mechanical revolution in agriculture which in common with all revolutions creates hardship for some people, but if wisely handled can reduce the cost of assembling and transporting milk and keep Vermont competitive in our great milk markets.

The combining of some artificial breeding cooperatives and egg marketing cooperatives which have been accomplished, and more cooperative mergers which are now in the discussion stage, indicate that the Vermont farmers are moving effectively to reduce costs and increase their bargaining power. The trend toward fewer and larger farms permits more effective organization.

FORESTRY

In forestry, also, plans have been made for prudent conservation and expansion of one of our most valuable resources, the woodlands. The Forestry Department has recently increased the production of little trees at our State Nursery from one million annually to twelve million per year by this next fall. Timber cut on our State forests by private operators under good forest practices has increased rapidly so that this past year \$40,350 was turned into the General Fund from timber sales.

During the biennial period, over 5,000 forest landowners have received assistance from the county foresters. During the past two years, 18 municipal forests have been established, making a total of 90 in the State. Last year, from these forests, over two million board feet of logs and twelve-hundred cords of wood were cut.

RECREATION

Vermont is getting wide recognition as a four-season recreation area. Our recreation-tourist industry is growing by leaps and bounds. The State Government, through several of its departments, has performed very satisfactorily in promoting different phases of this activity so desirable for the pleasure of our own people, and of great importance to our general economy. The program of the Vermont Development Commission has been of outstanding value.

We have, by far, the best winter recreational areas in the east. With highway access roads, we have interested more private capital to invest in new ski areas.

Our summer park program has expanded quickly and we are in a race to keep up with the ever-growing demands for more recreational facilities. From the \$200,000 bond issue authorized for expansion of State Parks by the 1957 Legislature, approximately 200 tent sites and 100 Green Mountain lean-tos, together with the necessary sanitary facilities, will be available for this summer's campers. The number of campers making use of our parks during the past four years has increased from 43,000 to over 70,000 annually, all of which means better economic conditions for the people of our State.

At no time in history have we seen such a growing interest in the Vermont outdoors. We are convinced that our fisheries and wildlife resources will continue to form an integral part of our vast recreation industry in Vermont. Looking to the future, as well as to the present, the fish and game programs are in keeping with the responsibilities of all of us to pass on to future generations every opportunity possible to use and enjoy the heritage which has come down to us.

The Fish and Game Department has shown a keen awareness of planning for the future, by acquiring access sites to our lakes and ponds, and also in the name of the State, lands available for public hunting so that Vermonters and their visitors will have rights-of-way providing more opportunities to fish and hunt in their leisure hours.

Research management, protection, propagation and conservation education, and more efficient law enforcement are effective tools of our Fish and Game Service. We now have one of the most modern chains of fish-raising installations to be found in the eastern part of the country. Sixty per cent of fish and game license receipts are contributed by out-of-state people.

The Champlain Valley region is a key point in the waterfowl flyway region from Canada to the Florida Keys. The Fish and Game Service apparently has done its job well in view of last summer's presentation to them of the Charles Banks Belt Medal, the Atlantic Flyway Council's top conservation award.

We can be much encouraged by the expanding cooperation between the Fish and Game Commission, the Forests and Parks Commission, the Water Resources Board and the State Department of Education.

In addition to the importance of tourist recreation which means much to our economy, we must not overlook the fact that our own Vermonters have an increasing need for recreation, in their home communities. It is encouraging to note that there is an ever-expanding program of recreational activities for all ages—children, youth, and adults, with trained leadership. The development of new recreation facilities—parks, playgrounds, swimming pools and community centers—indicates the interest on the community level in making towns attractive and a better place in which to live. The State Recreation Board has rendered many services to help the local communities help themselves.

Two years ago, plans were started for the Champlain Celebration. This year, New York and Vermont, with the collaboration of Canada, are celebrating the 350th Anniversary of the discovery of Lake Champlain by Samuel de Champlain. I trust that every community in Vermont will take part in this "year of history" which will do much to advertise Vermont to the world.

THE HISTORIC SITES COMMISSION

The Historic Sites Commission has carried out many projects during the last four years, including construction of an elevator in the Bennington Monument. Their most important accomplishment has been the

acquisition for the State of the Calvin Coolidge Homestead at Plymouth, made possible by the generosity of the late Mrs. Grace Coolidge and John Coolidge, the son of the President and Mrs. Coolidge.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Outstanding progress has been made in the management and conservation of our valuable natural resources. The State is now joining with the Federal and local governments to eradicate pollution of our streams and lakes. We are beginning to see real progress in this very important work, to conserve and improve our Water Resources.

Our geological program has been stepped up considerably since 1955 in order to have a State-wide geological map available by 1961, one hundred years after the last one was produced. Through cooperation with the Federal Government and other New England states, we now have additional flood control dams being erected in the State which will protect our lives and property in the years ahead. Many of these projects will also serve our recreational interests.

HEALTH AND WELFARE

The State's Health and Welfare programs have also expanded to meet the needs of our citizens. Our institutions, improved by sorely needed buildings, are better able to serve the demands made upon them. Also the work force has been increased to permit regular hours instead of sixty or more hours a week as formerly.

In our mental institutions, the emphasis is becoming more and more on rehabilitation and through our four rehabilitation centers, established and operated under our Board of Institutions and our Department of Education, we are taking advantage of modern medicines and treatments to produce remarkable success in many cases.

The emphasis on rehabilitation is more in evidence at Windsor Prison and the Weeks School. The Alcoholic Rehabilitation effort is also becoming more effective.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

While our accident rate on the highways and the number of fatalities continue to be excessive, we can take some satisfaction in the relatively fine record in Vermont this past year. Our reduction in highway fatalities in 1958 over the previous year was the largest percentage-wise of any state in nation. We must give considerable credit to the members of the Emergency Council on Highway Safety, authorized by the last Legislature, for this accomplishment. The studies made, and the effective information given to the public helped develop the fine cooperation of all State and local agencies and the public generally, which brought about the improved record.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Department of Public Safety, with its added personnel, has been able to continue its fine service along its various lines. The Fire Marshal's office is still very sadly undermanned, which situation should be corrected immediately. We have, as authorized by the 1957 Legislature, procedures so that the State Government can act more effectively in times of civil disasters. The Civil Defense division is trying to meet the changed conditions as set up by the National pattern.

NATIONAL GUARD

Vermont can be very proud of its National Guard, both the Army and the Air sections. While all of the armories authorized by the 1957 Legislature have not been built because of lack of Federal funds and authorizations, great progress has been made in the building programs both in the armories and at the headquarters at Camp Johnson and at the National Guard Air port in Burlington. At summer maneuvers, our units continue to perform in an outstanding manner.

PERSONNEL

The State has a fundamentally sound civil service program based on merit system principles. We are fortunate, too, in having a competent group of State employees who are subject to the civil service system and who benefit directly therefrom. We all recognize the need for rules and regulations which will assure orderly,

uniform procedures. Our personnel regulations, however, have become overcomplicated and highly technical, resulting in the introduction of cumbersome procedures and management frustrations. It is generally accepted that civil service employees should be selected on the basis of fair, open competition, but, by the same token, simple procedures should be available to agency employers and department heads which will permit prompt separation of unsatisfactory employees. Our present rules apparently make possible through technicalities serious delays in hearing appeal cases. Revision of the faulty personnel rules should be accomplished without delay.

The rates of compensation paid to the State's 3,300 classified civil service employees have been adjusted over the years to meet competitive wage and salary rates and fringe benefits payable in private employment in Vermont. They compare favorably with salary scales in effect in other New England states and do not appear to need any adjustment at the present time. Salaries of department and agency heads have not kept pace, however, and today we have a substantial number of classified employees whose salaries are equal to, and in many cases, in excess of the salaries paid to department heads who must assume vastly greater, more important responsibilities. This grievous inequity which has persisted for several years justifies urgent consideration.

INTERIM COMMISSIONS

I hope the Legislature will study and give serious consideration to the specific matters and recommendations on which some of the State's leading citizens have spent so much time and effort. I am referring particularly to the following:

“The Interim Commission to Study the Operation of State Government”;

“The Emergency Council on Highway Safety”;

“The Interim Commission on Nursing”;

“The Study of Vermont's Correctional Facilities by the National Probation and Parole Association and the Governor's Advisory Committee.”

FINANCES

To accomplish so much in improving State services and building for the future, it has, of course, been necessary to increase State expenditures. Four years ago, our State tax rates were increased considerably and two years ago there were some minor adjustments upward.

While current revenues are holding up very well, in fact increasing, we have not quite been able to match the expenditures authorized by the last Legislature from the General Fund. I will call to your attention that some members of the 1957 Legislature were somewhat over-optimistic and appropriations were made about one million dollars in excess of the Governor's recommendations, without any additional income being provided for. I hope that the members of the present Legislature, including those who contributed to that action in 1957, will remember this and be more careful in the current session.

I feel that the present time calls for prudence and careful consideration as regards the financial planning of State Government. As we analyze our real situation, I believe we can rest assured that a good foundation has been laid for the future growth of Vermont and the prosperity of its people. We have increased the amount of our bonded debt, but not to an excessive degree. Our credit rating is still “Triple A.” Our tax system has operated on a basis generally fair to business and to all our citizens, and until the recent recession, was supplying sufficient funds.

With the anticipated resumption of greater business activities generally in the Nation, and including our own area, I believe it is fair to assume that we can expect more income from our present tax rates than previously has been obtained. It would seem to me to be the part of wisdom to take a breathing spell at this time to allow our general economy to catch up with the expansion which we have already made in our basic programs and facilities. In my opinion, major increases in taxes cannot be justified at this time. Your problem will be to evaluate the progress which Vermont has made and is making, and to decide at what level of expenditures the people of Vermont can afford to be committed by their State Government.

CONCLUSION

From the standpoint of operating effectively the Executive Office of Government, I believe the single most important change to be made is a constitutional amendment allowing a four-year term of office for the Governor and some other officials. It certainly is not too early now to lay the necessary groundwork for such a change, because constitutional proposals will be under consideration for the next two years and will be first acted upon in 1961.

I think that more efficiency and effectiveness can also be brought about in another term of State Government by revamping our court system so that municipal judges would serve on a full-time basis. This, of course, would mean fewer judges and higher pay for those who did serve in this capacity.

These two steps—the four-year term for governor and the modernization of our municipal court system—would be major steps toward better government.

In the Legislative branch of government, there are also certain steps which could be taken to speed up the legislative processes. Among the most important of these is the responsibility of the committee chairmen in the House and Senate to avoid unnecessary delays in action on bills.

The lobbyists associated with the Vermont General Assembly are, for the most part, of the highest caliber and often are of the greatest value in providing committees with useful and necessary information. However, in some instances lobbyists are called upon to represent many clients during the legislative session and often find themselves overburdened with work. When this happens, committees are requested to delay hearings, and sometimes, of course, the real clever lobbyist will try to put off action on a bill until the closing days of the session, in hopes that in the confusion he will have a better chance to gain his ends.

I believe the committee chairmen can be of real service to all their fellow Vermonters if they schedule hearings fairly and honestly, and then insist that action proceed on the bill in an orderly fashion. If this cannot be done, it might then be desirable to consider very seriously the possibility of limiting the number of clients any one lobbyist may represent.

I shall always cherish my associations with the New England Governors' Conference and business groups working to create a better New England, of which Vermont is an integral part

During my years as Governor, many projects of regional interest were considered and definite progress was made in several areas. Besides the cooperation on Higher Education which I have already mentioned, there are many other areas in which endeavors of this nature may be carried out. I would like to mention two, with the recommendation that they receive serious consideration by this Legislature.

Vermont and all of New England could benefit greatly if the methods of doing business in the several states were clarified and simplified. This condition could be attained through acceptance of a **uniform commercial code**, which would place all methods of doing business in the several states on a similar basis.

Of a like nature is the regulation of the vast flow of personal and commercial traffic. It would be exceedingly beneficial to all concerned to have uniformity in this field as soon as possible. While much progress has been made in this direction in recent years, I hope a definite attempt will be made to develop a **greater uniformity of motor vehicle rules and regulations**.

There are many other thoughts that come to my mind concerning my experience, both as a Legislator and as your Chief Executive, but I know that you are much more interested in getting on with the job ahead of you. I will say that I have thoroughly enjoyed the seven sessions of the General Assembly with which it has been my privilege to work in one capacity or another. The people of Vermont have indeed been wonderful to both Mrs. Johnson and myself.

I know, also, that Vermont will continue to grow and prosper in the years ahead, probably at a faster rate than we now foresee. I leave the Governor's Office in the capable hands of my successor.

My best wishes and hopes for the future are extended to Governor Stafford, to other officials, to this General Assembly and to all the citizens of Vermont. May all work together effectively for good government.

Thank you.

Dissolution

The Governor, having concluded the reading of his Retiring Message, was escorted with Mrs. Johnson to the Executive Chamber by the Committee appointed by the Chair.

The Joint Assembly dissolved.

HOWARD E. ARMSTRONG,
Secretary of State, Clerk.