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ADDRESS

*of*

Governor Howard M. Gore

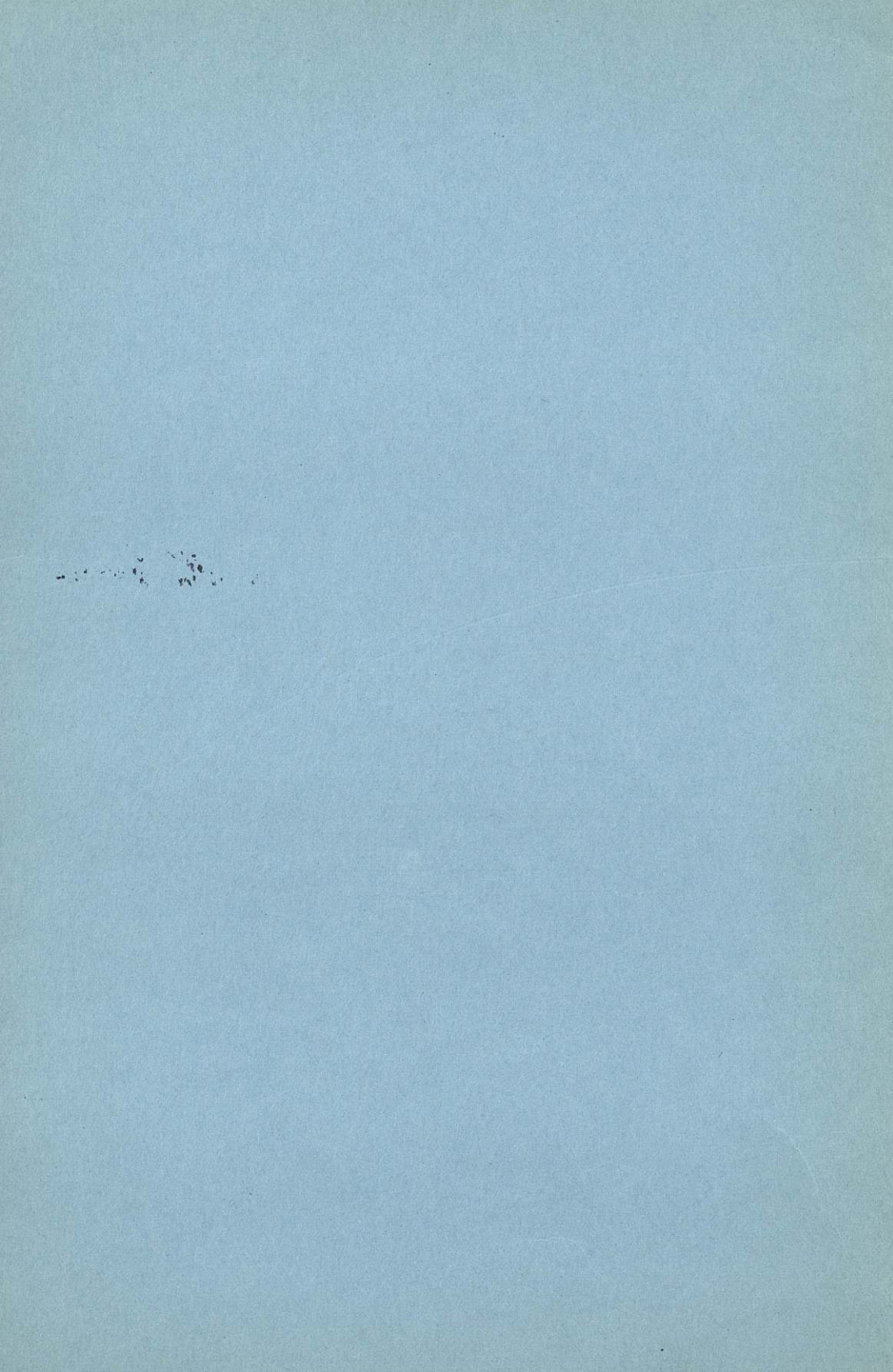
DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGIS-  
LATURE OF WEST VIRGINIA, IN THE HALL  
OF THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES, AT  
CHARLESTON, ON TUESDAY,  
APRIL 21, 1925.

*G. H. Vickers*

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*W. H. Vickers*

GOVERNOR HOWARD M. GORE

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# ADDRESS TO THE LEGISLATURE

APRIL 21, 1925

GOVERNOR GORE: Mr. Speaker and Mr. President: It is indeed a pleasure for me to come before you and pay my respects to the assembled Legislature of West Virginia.

In order that I may be clearly understood upon the matter of taxation which is now under consideration I deemed it wise to come before you and discuss it frankly.

The State of West Virginia takes a just pride in her institutions and in the activities that are a part of the life of the State. Those of you members of this Legislature who took part in the late war didn't go out to defend factories, you didn't go out to defend railroads, you didn't go out to defend banks—you went out to defend that indefinable and indescribable thing that you are lonesome for when you are separated from it, we call home. This symbolizes the life of the people of our State. (Applause.)

It should be borne in mind that the Governor of your State does not prepare your budget. The Board of Public Works is charged with that duty, of which board your Governor is a member. The Governor of this State cannot, of himself, recommend to this body legislation of this character, nor can you enact it in a regular session until you have dispensed with and disposed of the recommendations of that board. The members of this board are the elective officers of this State, elected by the people. Their duties are not prescribed by the Governor but by this honorable body and those bodies that have preceded. As members of that board only recently the supplemental budget came before us for consideration. It has been suggested that the Legislature has not had before it information bearing on the institutions and the activities of this State. The Board of Public Works presented to the first session of this Legislature a comprehensive report of the believed needs of the State; and when I came to the Governorship of this State, gentlemen, there was an indicated deficit in the revenues of this State, not brought about by executive inactivity or waste of money, but brought about by the failure of the Legislatures in the main, to provide the revenues for the appropriation bills they had passed.

Let us just consider for a moment one item. The Legislature preceding this appropriated a certain sum of money for buildings and

for lands, and for improvements, to be expended during the past two years. That fund, I am informed, shows a deficit of approximately \$1,000,000.00. Laws were passed directing the Superintendent of Schools to expend certain sums of money as supplemental aid. Whether that is wise or unwise is not for the Governor of this State to say, nor is he charged with the responsibility. That is a responsibility that you put upon the Superintendent of Schools by statute, and yet there was not revenue provided to carry out the funds that law required him to expend, and that the people all over the State had a right to believe they would get, by approximately \$850,000.00. And only recently this honorable body authorized the issuance of twenty million dollars worth of road bonds, the remainder of the fifty million. The interest and the sinking fund, if I am correct, is approximately \$1,800,000.00. No special revenue was provided for the sinking fund and interest required under the law; and whether the bonds have been sold or not, under existing statute a sinking fund must be created and maintained.

Now, what was the effect? Under the plan being followed we have attempted to provide a sinking fund and the interest on the entire fifty million, pay the current expenses of the road commission, and maintain the state highway system in a state of repair out of the revenue formerly used to care for only thirty million. Our experience in the Federal Government and in the States that have the best highway systems is that one of the most serious problems that confronts any road commission is the upkeep of the roads. Do you know, as a matter of fact, that five per cent, accelerated depreciation in the value of automobiles and similar vehicles in this State amounts to between five and ten million dollars a year. Now, gentlemen, what presents itself to the State Road Commission and to your Board of Public Works?

First, that the sinking fund, the interest on the fifty million dollars of bonds and department expense not only consumes all of the license taxes and all of the gasoline taxes, but creates a deficit in that fund of approximately six hundred thousand dollars, leaving practically nothing for upkeep.

We may as well face the situation squarely. We must either furnish the funds to carry on upkeep and maintenance work, or admit that there are no funds with which to take care of the roads now constructed and hereafter to be taken over.

Let us consider for a moment your state capitol, the new building. An unusual thing that has occurred in the construction of

the first unit, in which I had no part and no responsibility. Your Legislature appropriated \$250,000.00 for two years, authorizing your commission or your Governor to expend a sum not in excess of two and a half million dollars for two units, office building units, so-called; and one of the remarkable things in the history of building construction, either private or public, has occurred—and how they did it I do not know—apparently they have constructed it for thirty thousand dollars less than you told them they could spend. Now then, there is a deficit in that fund of approximately \$68,000.00. How does that deficit come about? It comes about plainly by reason of the fact that you only appropriated a half million, which together with the proceeds of the sale of the properties did not yield sufficient funds to complete the payment. That is the only reason.

Now, should we proceed with that capitol? Since I am discussing it, let's talk about it for just a moment. You have in your appropriation bill one item alone of \$27,000.00 to pay rent. The estimated cost of your second unit probably will be about a million and a half—not to exceed that—in fact, I think it should not be permitted to exceed that. For instance, you have your road commission scattered in two divisions. You also have various other state activities scattered; and it is a matter of common knowledge to every business man that a badly scattered force can never be co-ordinated nor can its work be properly effectuated as long as you leave it in that condition.

Now, what will you do about it? That is not a matter for the Governor of the State of West Virginia to say. That is a matter for this honorable body; but it is my judgment that nothing will be gained by longer deferring the orderly construction of your capitol, unit by unit, keeping the burden on the taxpayers of this State to the lowest possible figure consistent with economy in construction.

Another thing: take some of the educational institutions. The colored school at Institute, for example. Many of you have visited it. Down there you will find the representatives of a race not long freed from slavery struggling to equip themselves for better citizenship, sleeping and housed under conditions that certainly do not reflect credit. Let me say that it is the plain duty of this State to see to it that these conditions are improved. (Applause.)

Go over to the school for the deaf and blind at Romney and you will find those folks that nature has scarcely dealt generously with,

without adequate place to learn how to earn a livelihood in their defective condition.

Go down to your industrial school at Pruntytown and you will find a crowded condition. The same is true over at your other schools carried on for the same purpose.

Go with me to Terra Alta. Well, you may say that the person that that terrible plague, tuberculosis, has seized upon is not entitled to be considered by the citizens of this State; but if for no other reason than protecting the health of the other citizens of this state, we owe it to ourselves to take proper care of institutions of that kind; and any economy that involves the health of its citizens and the basic welfare of the children of this State is not economy. It is a dangerous policy.

It is true that there is a cry all over this State for lower taxes, and there is only one way that that cry can be answered to each person, whether their possessions be in the form of the modest equipment of a home or the most extended business enterprise—to lower the direct tax on this State. (Applause.) It is a matter of general knowledge that that tax has been exploited to the fullest degree in a local sense. In many communities it exceeds three per cent; in others it reaches as high as four and four and a quarter per cent, and the average is about two dollars and twenty cents. Last year the increase was about five cents, and the indicated increase for this year is still greater.

The time has come to give relief, where relief should be given. As a matter of public policy, in this time when we must economize to the utmost, I do not stand for a policy of strangulation that means disease and means retreat and means the curtailment of the unfolding life of the State. I stand for an intelligent economy, and by intelligent economy I mean the minimum expenditure that will keep our several institutions and state activities healthful. That is what I mean by economy. (Applause.) Any different economy is unwise and unstatesmanlike.

If, as at present, you utilize the ten cents direct tax as a basis for the general expenses of the State you take from the Governor and the Board of Public Works the last revenue to cover emergencies, in meeting your bond issues and your sinking funds, and to that I am opposed.

There have been many discussions of the tax system in this State, and that would be trying and disturbing if that was not the history from the time tithes were first collected. But, gentlemen and ladies, and members of this honorable body, we have long



been quarreling with each other, and the thinking people of this State who carry on the major activities are plainly challenged with an invitation to the council-table to meet this problem, meet it as men—for meet it we must. Some one said with respect to a revenue bill introduced by the chairmen of the finance committees of the two houses, that it made everybody mad, and I heard another say, “Well, we are agreed at last on one thing!”

Now, the situation is plainly this: we need an increased revenue to take care of these deficiencies that have grown up, that have come upon us from time to time, and that must be met, and I, for one, stand for raising the necessary revenue to take care of the normal development of our institutions and activities as will keep them normal and healthy, spending the smallest amount possible to accomplish that end.

What shall we do about it? I have understood there has been considerable query as to what part I had in the bills introduced by the chairmen of the two finance committees of your respective bodies. The bills proposed were shown to me. I have not been giving time to the consideration of revenues. I have spent long hours out of the day trying to meet the conditions that confront us in the industrial life of this State; and I may say to you that with a negligible fund and a handful of men we have so far begun to establish the principle that men may labor in West Virginia without fear of being bulldozed and beaten up, and that men may own their properties and their factories and their industries and feel secure in both, and operate them as they care to, as long as they are within the law. (Applause.)

If I may be charged with having been derelict in my attention to this Legislature it has been because I have been trying to meet a severer test elsewhere. Then, besides, I do not think it serves the ends of government well for the executive of the State to seek to impose his will and his wishes upon the members of a Legislature. You are the legislative branch of the government, and I take it that any time you felt that you cared to communicate with me, or cared for my judgment or expressed opinion or advice, you knew it would be most readily given. I have said so in my inaugural address and I say so now. I am not in the position of chief executive of this State with any thought in mind of running an individual expedition or carrying on a separate adventure, but simply to co-ordinate my efforts with yours in trying to establish the fact that West Virginia is on her way out of her difficulties, not prompted by her prejudices but by the consolidated and co-ordi-

nated judgment of the men and women of this State who think. (Applause.)

It has been suggested that we spend no more money than we have spent during the past two years. Well, remember this: that your appropriation bill carried a deficit in your building program of approximately a million; that your road bonds consumes the fund derived from the taxes arising from the sale of gasoline and from your automobile licenses. Gentlemen, that is not an executive deficit. That has been created by legislative authorization.

There are in the budget bill now recommended, in the supplemental report, items for buildings at your educational and eleemosynary institutions and this is the third bill they have been in, and appropriations made for, and not one dollar provided for. So far as I have the authority to direct the activities of this State, through the board of control or any other agencies, if you don't provide the money we won't build; and whatever sum you do provide will build the building, or it will be reported back to you that you did not provide an adequate sum. We are going to face the building problem of this State as a business proposition.

I do not know of any tax bill that squares with the judgment of all. I do not believe one such as that could be perfected. But let me say this: the rates and figures presented in the measure offered your honorable bodies by the chairmen of the respective finance committees of your two bodies, while they may not square with this honorable body as to their proper relation, I am informed by the chairmen of the respective committees that these rates were arrived at after full conference with the State Tax Commissioner and the best informed men on taxation in the State available, as being substantially just as among the several industries, and that these rates may be moved up or down as the amount of revenue this Legislature, in its wisdom, decides should be spent, whether it is the amount that I might recommend personally or one that you might determine. I think that that measure corrects many of the inequities of the old bill. Read the total collections and see if that isn't true. And then it proposes to hold in reserve the authorized ten-cent direct tax which, if you include in your scheme of raising revenue, would compel the board of public works to lay a direct tax of from five to ten cents in addition to the present fourteen-cent tax to meet the deficits that have been created; and I want this Legislature, gentlemen, to assume responsibility for that, for I am unalterably opposed to the increase in the direct tax of this State as it affects every taxpayer.

It is not my intention to infer that this is the only way to meet the situation, but until a more equitable suggestion is proposed I stand squarely behind the chairmen of the finance committees and their associates who proposed these bills to you. Let it not be misunderstood. The amount of the rates is determined by the amount of money you decide to expend. Insofar as an executive can assume responsibility let me say this to you, that knowing the everyday people of this State as I believe I do, I don't believe that they will sanction any policy that neglects the legitimate and necessary institutions for your children and those misfortune has overtaken. (Applause.) And I, here and now, will assume responsibility for asking this Legislature to provide that revenue, and if, in the last analysis, you further desire me to assume responsibility I will give you my plan.

Let me say this to you: I am not unaware of the trying difficulties; but when you go back home to your several communities, and to the institutions that you own, I want you to go back feeling that we have met the situation squarely.

Now, with respect to the officials of the State who are elected, let me say this to you, that they are chosen by the people of the State and are responsible to the voters of this State and to you—not to me. They have presented their budget. I am not familiar with the necessity of their expenditures. They are. But it is a matter of record that this Legislature has already imposed upon practically every state official new and additional duties that you expect them to perform. Now, either give them the funds to take care of it, or let us meet it squarely; and I, for one, will join with you in abolishing any and every institution that you feel you have not the funds to meet. (Applause.)

Mr. Speaker and Mr. President of the Senate, it is a great privilege to come and visit with you as neighbor to neighbor, the representatives of a people who are not surpassed either in sound judgment, patriotism or intelligence elsewhere in this nation. To be the Governor of such people I would rather be than to wear the diadem of any king that has sat upon his throne since creation dawned. (Applause.) Not for the purpose of being a ruler, but for the purpose of co-ordinating my efforts with yours to make West Virginia a greater State, a securer State, both as to life and to property, and to opportunity, than any other State under the canopy of the Stars and Stripes. (Applause.) To have had this opportunity to present in the disconnected way that I have these matters that I have discussed here with you, I am deeply grateful.

I see down yonder sits Chief Lambie. You will pardon me for being personal, but a few days ago word came that there had been an explosion in the mine at Barrackville. It is a matter of common knowledge to those who are familiar with the wonderful coal fields of this State that in many sections there are shafts; at this particular mine a shaft of some three hundred feet in depth. Word came to Chief Lambie and he happened to be on the train at Grafton; the United States car happened to be readily available at Pittsburgh; and the first person in that mine happened to be your chief. He went down into the gas; he went down under conditions that the slightest mistake would have blown him and his party to atoms. I want to say to you that the work of Chief Lambie and his associates has attracted the admiration of the whole mining world. It is recognized as one of the remarkable pieces of work in the mining world. And he was only able to do it because, in addition to his own meagre equipment, there happened to be quickly available the equipment of the Federal Government, and they sent the best men they had, including our own J. W. Paul. Now, if Chief Lambie asks you for a reasonable appropriation to equip his department to meet similar situations, plainly, we have got to meet it or property will have further destruction. If you expect him to take care of the property give it to him if he establishes a need for it. That is economy. Do you know that it will take over half a million dollars to put the present Barrackville mine back into condition so it can be worked and take care of the increased insurance rates in that immediate locality? Give this man a chance. I beg your pardon for calling special attention to it, but I wanted to tell you that for six days they searched in that mine for the living and dead, some two miles square, with at times enough explosive gas present to have destroyed all.

The other morning I was called out of bed about seven o'clock—a rather late time for a farmer to get up—and do you know what the word was? That one of your state policemen took twelve foreigners who came approaching the mine intent on mischief, without even drawing his gun. He was out there protecting the industries and protecting those laborers, union and non-union, against any vicious practices on the part of any one. And if they ask you for companions to aid them in meeting this situation, or for reasonable equipment, in the name of prosperity and the peace and dignity of the State refuse it only because they have failed to establish the need for it.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of this Honorable Body, ladies and gentlemen, let me say to you that I have but one ambition, and that is to help and work with you to promote West Virginia; and let it be understood that I stand for such an increase in revenue in this State along the lines indicated in the bill proposed by your financial chairmen that will keep the institutions of this State functioning in a healthy condition, or I stand ready to join with you in the abolition of those you feel we can not afford.

Let me thank you for this kind and generous reception.



