

Inaugural Address

ROBERT B. MEYNER

Governor of New Jersey



*To the Legislature
January 19, 1954*

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	3
Freedom of the Individual	3
Law Enforcement	4
Beware of Superficial Remedies	4
Duties of the Citizen	5
No Iron Curtain	6
Improved Legislative Process	6
A Livelier Democracy	7
Study at the Source	7
Some Major Problems	8
Labor Measures	8
Taxation	9
State Aid for Schools	9
A Medical and Dental College	9
Mental Health and Prisons	10
Agriculture and Industry	10
Other Objectives	11
Conclusion	11

Inaugural Address

Members of the Legislature, Governor Driscoll, My Fellow Citizens:

Mindful that our progress over the centuries and our hopes for the future are inevitably dependent upon Divine Providence, I have taken the oath and accepted the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey.

I do so with a prayer that Almighty God will give me the zeal, the energy, the intelligence and understanding to govern in the spirit of the preamble to the Constitution of our State. The preamble expresses gratitude to the Almighty for the civil and religious liberty which He has so long permitted us to enjoy, and looks to Him for a blessing upon our endeavors to secure and transmit this liberty unimpaired to succeeding generations.

Illustrious predecessors in this office have brought honor to New Jersey and have left legacies of thought and action that will serve to light our path.

To Governor Driscoll, who for seven years has devoted his energies to the State, I want to pay tribute. One of the monuments to his administration is our 1947 Constitution.

FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

We meet at a time in history when the liberty of the individual is threatened both from abroad and at home. The world of 1954 is tragically divided; it is half-slave and half-free.

Since our shores were first settled more than three centuries ago, American government has been predicated on the proposition that the freedom of the individual is inviolate. But each generation must safeguard this principle and no generation has had a greater obligation in this respect than ours.

All citizens must be zealous to guard the constitutional rights of individuals—rights which were won by the blood and agony of

our ancestors. Tyranny sometimes walks in the guise of extreme idealism or super patriotism. Tyranny so cloaked subtly enslaves the mind and numbs the senses. Freedom of expression, of thought, and of intellectual inquiry then becomes its prey. This we must resist with all our force.

At the same time, we cannot forget that liberty is not license to aid or comfort those who seek to destroy our freedoms.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

In our own State we face another threat to the preservation of freedom. There have been pernicious incursions upon the peace and dignity of our people. The hoodlum, the racketeer, and the professional gambler have made their appearance in New Jersey. To tolerate their activities is to abdicate the supremacy of law. By so doing we jeopardize the safeguards and guarantees which preserve for us the tranquillity and security of an orderly society.

Throughout the recent gubernatorial campaign emphasis was placed on the need for improved law enforcement. Our Constitution says that we shall not be deprived of our lives, liberty or property except by due process of law. If we are to hold fast to this heritage our government must be under law, and not under men who condone its violation. It is impossible for the underworld to operate successfully without the connivance of public officials who are sworn to enforce the law. The breaking up of such alliances is a task which will concern our administration. In New Jersey we have on the books substantially all the legislation necessary to cope with crime. What we need is thorough enforcement. It will be forthcoming.

In the office of the Attorney-General, it is my hope that the public will be represented by the finest law firm available—whose members can meet opposing lawyers on an equal footing, both in criminal and civil matters. The Attorney-General's office will set the tone for all other law-enforcement agencies, to the end that those who operate beyond the pale do so at their peril.

BEWARE OF SUPERFICIAL REMEDIES

The problem of law enforcement cannot be cured by more laws or the creation of a new bureau or agency. Indeed, in these

days of constantly expanding governmental operations and mounting public financial burdens, a reappraisal of our general concepts of state government and of its relationship to the individual is required.

Too often our citizens seek solutions to economic problems and remedies to social injustice through legislative panaceas which add additional burdens to our state government. Governors almost without exception have recognized the ever mounting costs of state government and the need for its reorganization to keep pace with changing trends.

Such reorganization is a continuing process and must be adapted to the changing social and economic needs of our complex modern society. Bigger government is not in itself necessarily better government and the creation of new agencies is often a superficial remedy. Hence, any reorganization should be preceded by more than cursory study. In this process full advantage should be taken of the research facilities of our universities and the modern techniques of our leading business institutions. Greater reliance upon these resources could well minimize waste and promote economy. The essential needs of the people should be met by an adequate number of public servants and public agencies, but no more.

DUTIES OF THE CITIZEN

The times call for the individual citizen to reexamine his obligations to the community. In a profound sense, the public at large constitutes a fourth branch of government. The effective discharge of the duties of the established branches—executive, legislative and judicial—depends, in vital measure, upon the voice of the all-powerful fourth branch. In keeping with this grave responsibility, the public should concern itself with the business of government, and it should exercise a salutary influence upon political party organizations. The individual has duties as well as rights. As Thomas Paine said: "Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it."

The several branches of government are not watertight compartments. They are interrelated. While close cooperation among them is in the public interest, so also should they scrupulously avoid encroaching on the provinces of the other branches. This is true

not only of the judiciary which is the ultimate arbiter of the constitutional bounds of each branch, but is also true of the legislative and executive.

The executive department is symbolized by the Governor; actually, it is composed of more than 23,000 public servants. They give the state government continuity. They, by the quality of their services, create the attitude which the general public assumes toward the State. At the same time, decent and considerate treatment of State employees is a matter of enlightened self-interest on the part of the State. High morale is essential to superior service.

NO IRON CURTAIN

In reading the inaugural messages of some of my predecessors, I was struck by the thought expressed by Governor James F. Fielder forty years ago, when he said: "Too many bills are introduced of not the slightest importance to the state at large and too many unnecessary and defective laws are enacted each year . . . The proof of a legislator's capacity is not to be found in the great number of bills he may introduce and pass, but rather in the quality of the few which bear his name . . .".

Governor Fielder's point is as valid today as it was then.

I shall lower no iron curtain between the executive and the Legislature. The Governor's office will make full disclosure of the reasons for any proposal, and will furnish all pertinent information. Department heads will do likewise. If the executive department drafts a bill, it will be submitted without any petty pride of authorship or any jealous concern as to sponsorship. Full cooperation in a legislative program between the executive branch and the legislative branch will be sought at all times.

IMPROVED LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Of its own volition, the Legislature is taking the highly laudable step of abolishing the old caucus system and of breathing life into the committees. It is hoped that the State can look forward to a new era of open debate and continued improvement of the legislative process.

In the days to come, may we furnish an example of a Legislature and an executive department, each alive to its own responsibility, neither jealous of the responsibilities or prerogatives of the other, and both striving, sympathetically, for the attainment of the common weal. I will not burden you with vexatious or frivolous proposals and may I ask similar consideration on your part.

To revert to the fourth branch—the people themselves—the State Constitution wisely provides for public participation in certain governmental decisions. The people vote on constitutional changes; they pass on bond issues; they approve or reject referenda on various other matters. An example of direct public participation in the formulation of public policy was the bingo amendment approved overwhelmingly in last November's election.

A LIVELIER DEMOCRACY

I am a strong advocate of submitting important questions to the people on the ground that it makes for a livelier, more responsive and more responsible democracy. Without seeking to evade my own responsibilities as Governor, or to invade the province of the Legislature, I will consider recommending the submission of various matters of substance for popular decision, in the spirit of the old New England town meeting which met at least once a year to lay down general policies and to give each citizen an individual voice. One question might be increased State aid for our schools; another, important fiscal policies.

The public will be fully informed of the actions and purposes of my administration. Public announcements will be issued on all important or newsworthy developments. Press conferences will be held frequently. Periodic reports will be made to the people over television and radio, and my office door will be open at regular intervals to receive suggestions from citizens.

STUDY AT THE SOURCE

I also want to revive, at least to a limited degree, the practice of earlier Governors who made visits to various parts of the State to meet people in their own communities. It seems to me the Governor cannot fully appreciate the problems of citizens unless he studies and discusses them at the source. No Governor should sit

in an ivory tower. By studying issues in the localities where they originate, I hope to increase my usefulness to the people.

By these means, it is our hope that a participating interest in the affairs of the State will be stimulated. An alert public tends to produce responsive government.

SOME MAJOR PROBLEMS

It is not the intention here to discuss in detail all of the specific problems that confront the State. Some of them will be treated in the budget message and others in special messages to the Legislature. Reference to some of the major problems will suffice to indicate general lines of approach and policy.

By mandate of the people at the last election, it is our duty to propose a law legalizing the games of bingo and raffles and I have appointed a committee of able and representative lawyers to aid us in that regard. Such a law should permit non-profit organizations to raise funds, yet contain safeguards against invasion by lawless elements.

LABOR MEASURES

A number of labor problems press urgently for solution. These should have prompt attention. One is the question of a state labor relations act. New Jersey is the only major industrial State in the East without one. In the light of present living costs, the question as to the sufficiency of existing unemployment and workmen's compensation and disability benefits requires realistic study. There is a need too, for an over-all minimum wage law.

A new approach to the grave problem of public utility labor disputes has been demanded for some time. Serious doubts have arisen as to both the constitutionality and effectiveness, from a collective bargaining standpoint, of the provisions for compulsory arbitration in the present law. Yet a workable and legal solution must be found to recognize both the right of the public to a continuous supply of essential public services and the rights of employer and employee to fair treatment.

Moreover, the act regulating public utilities is badly in need of revision. It abounds in ambiguities and leaves uncharted large areas of supervision.

TAXATION

Of paramount importance is the age-old problem of taxation. This subject has two major aspects. The first is whether the burden could be distributed more fairly and equitably, and in the best interests of the economy of the State. The second is the absence of uniformity in assessing real and personal property at the local level. In this respect, each local assessor is a law unto himself. This situation is intolerable.

Recent reports by the State Tax Policy Commission contain notable suggestions in this field.

One conclusion of the Commission in its 1950 Report was that "the State of New Jersey is completely lacking in a long range fiscal policy." That is still true today.

The challenge of our tax problems calls for statesmanship of a high order. They have troubled every Governor and Legislature since colonial days. We must measure up to the task in both the legislative and executive branches.

STATE AID FOR SCHOOLS

Linked with fiscal policy is the question of state aid for education. In 1952-53, New Jersey was second only to New York in educational expenditures per pupil. But the funds come largely from local taxes on real and personal property. In 1952, only four state governments in the country spent less money per capita in state aid to education than New Jersey. Our State has never paid more than one-fifth of the total cost of education.

Last year the School Aid Commission, established by the Legislature in 1950, recommended greatly increased state aid for schools. This question is now beyond controversy, and ways must be found to solve it other than by compounding the excessive burdens of real property owners.

At the same time, we should set up a revolving fund to help needy school districts finance new construction at reasonable interest costs.

A MEDICAL AND DENTAL COLLEGE

New Jersey has great need of a State College of Medicine and Dentistry, a fact deeply impressed upon me during my service on

the Medical College Commission. The possibility of obtaining the necessary funds from private sources should be thoroughly explored. In the event sufficient funds are not forthcoming, the issue should be presented to the voters this Fall.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PRISONS

One of the gravest tasks of the State lies in the fields of mental health, correction and welfare administration, presided over by the Department of Institutions and Agencies. Here again we are faced with a continuing problem. Back in 1917, when Governor Edge first took office, we find him calling attention to the overcrowded condition of the State Prison here in Trenton. Today the State Prison is still crowded. It has been proposed that a new prison be built by an initial investment of \$4,800,000 in bond issue funds, and adding \$3,000,000 a year for three years from general revenues. In other words, it is proposed to spend nearly \$14,000,000 in capital investment to house some 1200 inmates. That amounts to more than \$11,000 per occupant.

These figures give rise to reflection as to whether ways may not be found to reduce the costs of penal institutions and, at the same time, decrease the idleness which is the curse of so many imprisoned men, by dispersing their places of confinement and broadening their occupations.

In dealing with human beings who suffer the handicaps of disease, dependency or delinquency, it is my hope the State can attain an eminent position. We need adequate personnel and research, training and educational programs; proper executive direction; increased attention to preventive measures. We should pursue such a course most actively.

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

In agriculture, we can take pride in the fact that New Jersey farms earn the highest gross income per acre in the nation. Team effort has made this possible. The captain of the team is the New Jersey farmer himself, aided by the State Department of Agriculture, such organizations as the Farm Bureau and the State Grange, the agricultural scientists at the State University, county agents and

4-H and Future Farmers of America. We should seek to continue our agricultural progress.

Our State is rich in industry, but we should be ever alert to encourage new industries to come here, old industries to stay and present industries to enlarge their plants. Here the stabilization and equalization of our tax system is of paramount importance. A vigorous program is needed to guarantee the industrial stability and the sound expansion of the State.

OTHER OBJECTIVES

These are some of the objectives of the new administration. There are many others. We must consider tighter departmental reorganization, better administrative procedures, housing and slum clearance, improved rapid transit facilities, an expanded highway system, air pollution and other public health problems, simplification of municipal laws, conservation of our natural resources, a park system consistent with our urban development, overall state zoning and planning, an adequate water supply, a strengthened civil service and civil defense, and many other matters of high importance.

CONCLUSION

Above all, we must ever be conscious that in government, as in life, nothing is ever permanently settled, nothing ever disposed of beyond the need for continuous study and action. It is a timeless process, an endless campaign against smug self-approval.

In my travels over the State and in my talks with countless citizens, I have learned of their aims and aspirations, which I shall strive to translate into a program of action. Let us look forward, with the aid of Almighty God, to a future of energetic and progressive administration, in the spirit of the words of the Great Seal: "Liberty and Prosperity."

ROBERT B. MEYNER,
Governor.

January 19, 1954.