

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

of

GOVERNOR BRENDAN T. BYRNE

*(Delivered by Governor Byrne at the War Memorial Building
Jan. 15, 1974.)*

Reverend Clergy, Mr. Chief Justice, my Distinguished Predecessors, Members of the Legislature, my family, friends and fellow citizens:

We begin today the task of proving that our best beliefs about each other and ourselves can become the reality upon which free government is built.

We begin today to prove that a government can be honest . . . can be effective . . . can learn to listen . . . can better the quality of our daily lives.

The first generation of Americans made no warranty on our future. They gave New Jersey, and the rest of the Nation, a Constitution, and a process, for us to use or destroy. Providence gave us more: fertile fields, a magnificent coastline, and power to build our industries.

But neither God nor man can give us a government that will serve us and not bleed us. That is for us to build. That is what we must try to do. And we must try to do this without illusions, without the false hopes of distant saviours, but with a firm understanding that while we are in trouble, we have an enormous reservoir of strength and dedication.

I took an oath to uphold our Constitution at a time when men at the highest levels of national leadership have been found wanting in their loyalty to that Constitution; and at a time when the sense of outrage that has swept our land has immobilized our national leadership. I make this pledge to rebuild New Jersey—physically and politically—at a time when forces we once looked to for help seem unable or unwilling to make that effort.

So be it. For it is time to stop looking beyond our borders and to look to the people of New Jersey—to ourselves. To others, this state may be a passageway from one metropolis to another, or a place in which to invest money. Those of us here today have invested far more; our lives, our children's lives, our most enduring dreams of a good life. No government can deliver our dreams to our doorsteps. What government can do—and what I pledge to do—is to help build the kind of public policy which enables each of us to fulfill our dreams by our own hands.

That task begins here and now. And it begins by using the powers of public policy to keep our state's government and our leaders honest. Perhaps human nature will limit

what can be done. Perhaps public indifference will again allow lawless men to be leaders in a lawful society. But we will not lose the battle without a fight.

This means, first, that the government of New Jersey is not for sale: not to the speculators, not to the easy money men. If this administration is remembered for nothing else, I want it to be remembered as the last administration elected in the marketplace of private financial campaign contributions.

Therefore, I ask the Legislature for a law providing for the public financing of all future gubernatorial campaigns and for strict, enforced controls on the flow of private wealth into political hands. This will not be an easy law to pass or enforce, but it will be one of the most vigorous fights I will make. We must free the political process from the chains of wealth, just as we freed it from the chains of political tyranny.

In addition, we will seek methods—such as post card registration of voters—to encourage and enlarge participation in the political process.

If our national Congress and Executive are too fearful to restore that process to the people, then let New Jersey lead the way.

Honesty is necessary for New Jersey. But it is not sufficient. For beyond the question of integrity is the question of what we do as a state: how we shape the future, or let it shape us. Right now, as we meet, tens of thousands of our children are in schools. What they learn and how they learn will determine how they will live and work for the rest of their lives.

To live with an educational system that does not reach and teach as many children as is humanly possible, to chart a young child's future on the basis of family wealth or neighborhood affluence, is to impose an unequal burden that mocks the deepest faith of our American system: the faith that ability, not nobility of birth or income, is the test of how well a citizen will achieve in his life.

The opportunity for the same education as a neighbor is the minimum a state can do. New Jersey is not doing that now. Therefore, I will call the State Legislature into special session in late spring to meet the mandate of the Constitution and make a thorough and efficient education for our children a reality.

There is much more to be done. People are without jobs and hope; a rail system must be rebuilt; a magnificent shoreline is in danger; crime saps the vitality from our cities; more housing must be built; senior citizens should be given the opportunity to live in dignity.

While there is much to do, there is also much to build on. We have almost all of the major business enterprises at work in New Jersey; we have great colleges and universities;

we have the minds from more than 600 research laboratories, working on every conceivable problem of science and technology, that can be put to work on our problems.

And I do not want our political differences to obscure the enduring contributions made to this state by the administration of Governor Cahill. In areas such as higher education, the environment, and land use, Governor Cahill has demonstrated a capacity for courage and hard work that I hope to draw on in the coming years.

In building, we have each other—more than seven million people, often at odds with conflicting ideas, who have nonetheless determined that New Jersey is where their lives will be spent.

I cannot promise our people a life of ease during the next four years, but I can promise them equal rights for all and special privileges for none.

I cannot promise that my administration will be free of mistakes, but I can promise that we will not fail because of complacency or lack of understanding.

I cannot promise that this administration will leave nothing undone, but I can promise an end to the politics of impotency that drowns itself in surveys and commissions but falls to carry out meaningful reforms.

I cannot promise that this administration will be as popular when it leaves office as it is today, but I can promise that your government will be largely what you choose to make it.

And I can promise that my actions will not be guided by partisan political considerations. In its day-to-day handling of affairs of state, this administration will be guided by the words of Woodrow Wilson: "If you think too much about being re-elected, it is very difficult to be worth re-electing."

Today, our people, like the nation, are restless. We are living with a national government that is hard to believe and almost impossible to trust. That aspect of these times adds urgency to our mission. For what a great thing it would be if we could send a simple message from our state to the nation . . . a message that an involved and interested people can inspire an honest, open and efficient government.

So, we recommit ourselves to a very old idea—that government is a common venture between the people and their leaders. We now begin our venture, to make the future as good, as fair and as just as it can be. It is that spirit I hope to bring to our work in the next four years. In that task I ask your help and God's.