

INAUGURAL MESSAGE

of

DWIGHT GRISWOLD

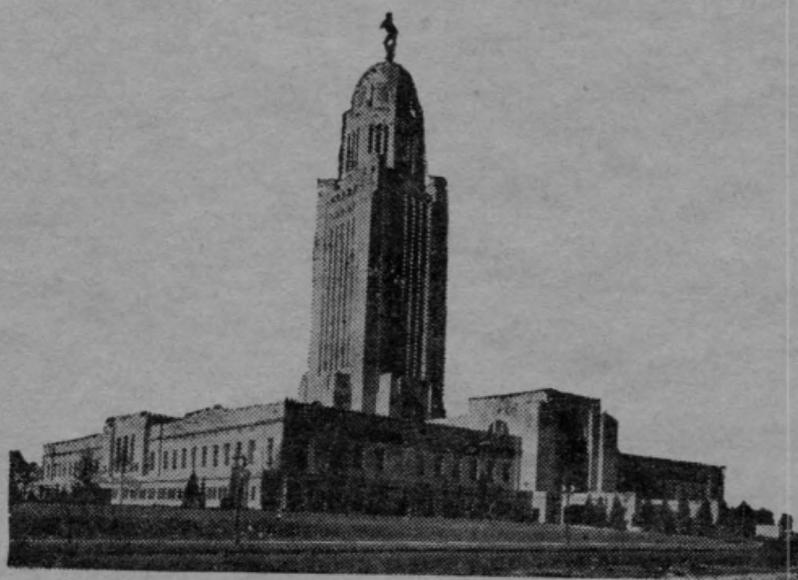
GOVERNOR

To The

MEMBERS OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Of The

STATE LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA



Delivered January 4, 1945

Lincoln, Nebraska



GOVERNOR DWIGHT GRISWOLD

Elected November 7, 1944, to a third term
as Chief Executive of Nebraska

Mr. President, Members of the Senate:

Many of you are here to continue a task of leadership. The remaining few of you are here to begin a task of leadership. I am here to work with all of you.

All of us—each of you Senators, and I, as Governor—were chosen by Nebraskans who felt certain enough of our judgment and abilities to entrust us with the destiny of this great State. It is a confidence we must not fail.

I repeat, it is a confidence we must not fail.

First, we must not fail this confidence because it springs from the faith that free men have in their own competence to govern themselves with a leadership of their own choice, from their own ranks, for their own general welfare. That faith is the thing for which Nebraskans and other Americans die today. It is a cherished faith, a sacred faith, worthy of even more than our best.

Second, we must not fail this confidence of the people because our actions here will not be erased with the termination of this legislative session, nor be deleted at the close of the next two years. Rather, they will become part of Nebraska's heritage and, as such, may well bear upon this state's governmental philosophy for generations to come.

In short, this gift of confidence is more precious than many of the givers realized. Therefore, the burden of its custody becomes greater.

But while the task placed upon you as Legislators and upon me as Governor, is heavy with responsibility, it is also bright with oppor-

tunity. Before us, surely, lie the seeds of peace. Behind us, certainly, is a harvest of experience.

It is my sincere hope that together we can draw wisely upon the experience of our State and of our people as we prepare the ground for a thriving life of peace. I wish to make clear at once that I am not anticipating, and most certainly I am not suggesting, that a great flood of new legislation be offered in the ambitious hope of providing Nebraskans with a revised mode of living to be put on, like a new suit of clothes, when the present grim conflict is victoriously concluded. Instead, I am thinking of the need for re-determining our objective and I am thinking of the state of mind which will be needed to approach that objective.

In this brief message, I do not intend to burden you with recommendations for specific bits of legislation affecting this or that state department, or this or that state institution. There are several reasons why I do not consider it necessary at this moment to give you an outline of bills I would enact if I were the legislature.

First among these reasons is that I am not the legislature. You are the legislature and I have every confidence in your ability and sincerity.

Second, you and I will come to know each other's views on various subjects quickly enough during the next few weeks, and I will address you occasionally regarding special matters.

Third, and most important, the destiny of a state rarely, if ever, hangs upon the thread of any one specific legislative enactment.

And so, rather than spend these few minutes with you in a discussion of proposed bills, I believe it would be much more profitable to tell you why I am concerned over such generalities as "our objective" and our "state of mind."

As Governor, I have proceeded on the belief that during the war, the war must come first, despite its horror and heart-breaks, and its wasteful destruction. In my inaugural message two years ago, I urged that it would be a mistake to thrust new laws and regulations upon our people while their every effort was being bent toward the building of this nation's war machinery. This advice did not stem from a conviction on my part that a good administration must be fearful of change. On the contrary, it was given because I believe that, generally speaking, uncertainties are too great during the flux of war to permit a state to embark upon new domestic ventures with any reasonable degree of safety.

Though this Fifty-Eighth Legislative Session, like its predecessor, also begins amid the war, we can begin to see a little more clearly the proportion of some of the changes that must come to our State with the return of peace. Even as recently as two years ago there may have been some who hoped that when the fighting was over, we could return to the old life of peace, pick up our former tools, and resume the routine we used to know. But now, there can be no doubts. There will be no going back to where we stood before. The way through the future must be cut with change.

For example, it is already apparent that certain changes must be made in our educational system. Of course, we did not expect our

schools to prepare our young people for the needs of war, but we did expect them to provide a basic foundation of academic learning, solid enough to support technological training such as the war has demanded. The fact that our armed forces have had to take time out to teach our young people the fundamentals of geography, applied mathematics, applied sciences, and, in some instances, languages and civic government, is not so much an indictment of our failures of the past, as it is a challenge to do something about it in the future. The educational deficiencies the war has revealed are not peculiar to Nebraska, though in this state the uneconomic pattern of our sprawling school district system loomed large as a result of teacher shortages.

Here is a second example of the need for change that has been uncovered by the war. We know now that at least one out of every three of our young men is unable to meet the physical or psychiatric standards required of a good soldier. Surely, there is not that much difference between the requirements of a good soldier and a good citizen. And so, again, we face change.

I have cited these two specific examples only to drive home the point that changes—many of them—are coming. At the moment, I am not concerned with the mechanics of legislation we may ultimately use in an attempt to accomplish these alterations. But I am concerned with the kind of thinking that is to prevail during the period of transition.

This Legislature may break some of the ground for a few of the changes that are to come with peace. Before any such steps are

taken, however, we must first decide whether we want our state society to determine the standard of the individual citizen, or whether we want the citizen to determine the standard of the state society.

In this regard, there seems to be a growing tendency to consider government as something apart from the people. Hardly a month passes but that somebody explains to you, almost apologetically, that he does not believe in taking ration points, or in collecting a 20 per cent tax, but that he must because "the government" requires it. And then, both of you shake your heads as though "the government" were some unfriendly third party.

That kind of thinking is evidence that we sometimes forget just what sort of vehicle the founders of this nation had in mind when they wrote in The Declaration of Independence that government exists to secure the inalienable rights of man, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Government in this country, and in this state, is not a third party. It is a reflection of the whole people, highlighted by the will of the majority and softened by the opinion of the minority, and it exists for the prime purpose of safeguarding the individual rights we claim as human beings.

So long as we respect this basic concept, we cannot expect government to become a sort of robot that will provide us with food and shelter and care for us in sickness and in death. We cannot expect government to do that, unless we are willing to sacrifice our long-standing claim to individual rights. Men who insist upon the right to captain their own individual destinies must also accept the responsibility of their own individual command.

We do have the right to expect our government to protect, on an equitable basis, our individual right to an opportunity for a decent life. Sometimes the safeguards we have established to accomplish this end become outmoded and must be revised. Sometimes the safeguards prove inadequate and need to be reinforced. Sometimes our own development of a more complex society creates an incidental threat to individual opportunity and it becomes necessary to curb this new menace.

It is my feeling that we are approaching a time when a number of plans will be offered for the avowed purpose of providing us with greater opportunities to pursue a full and decent life. There will be no quarrel with the intent of these plans, but there will be danger if we forget that in this nation and in this state, the right of the individual holds the basic priority. Should we forget that priority, our desire to improve the general welfare might cause us, with the blindness of Isaac, to confer upon the artificial state a birthright that belongs to the human individual.

In our zeal to progress, we will be wise to remember that the pace of our advance cannot be set to match the abilities of those in the vanguard of our society. The pace, instead, must be set so that those individuals who lag at the other end of our social column will have a reasonable chance to catch up, under their own power, if such is their desire. The best teacher, when I was a boy in school, was not the one who worked for me all the problems which were assigned; the best teacher was the one who caused me to work so that I myself solved the problems correctly. Government has the same responsibility.

Always it is an easy matter to cite the existence of evils and inequities. It is easy to find fault. Candid observation, however, usually reveals that the evils and the inequities only reflect the inherent evil and weakness of mankind and that legislation, which does not cause the individual citizens to improve themselves, will not effect a cure. We cannot expect legislation to succeed which presumes that we are better than we are, and we should build upon the premise that we are a race of very human beings. And neither can we expect legislation to succeed which assumes that we are more wealthy than we are—which assumes that our state is richer than the people who make up the state.

Throughout seventy-eight years of statehood, Nebraskans have guarded carefully the inherent dignity of the individual. And yet, during those years, Nebraskans have always been pioneers. They have not been afraid of frontiers, nor of change. Populism—much of the liberal doctrine—was born here. The unique unicameral structure of your own senatorial body is an example. It is proof that change and progress is possible without departure from our original concept of government and its relation to the individual. We Nebraskans do not believe in a collectivist state—we do believe in progress for the individual citizen.

Today, Nebraska stands well forward in a nation to whose bright spires of strength the eyes of many men in many countries are looking for courage and inspiration. They are men who desire that they, too, might lift their heads and square their shoulders and say, "In my country also man has certain inalienable rights,

including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

In time of peril, when man strikes man with all his might, it is easy to become discouraged and disillusioned. When young, strong life is strewn and broken wilfully upon the beaches and hills and streets, it is easy to ask, "Where now is this dignity of man? Where now is your individual right?" But when such doubts assail us, we only need remember it was the individual—not the government—it was the individual, the human being, who paid with pain and blood and death; we must remember that it is the man for whom we grieve, and not the state whose soulless walls tumble in the dust.

I bid you Godspeed.