Inaugural Message
of
James Withycombe
to the
Twenty-eighth Legislative Assembly—1915
GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE:

In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, and the custom of preceding Governors, it becomes my duty, as it is my pleasure, to address to you upon this occasion a message of greeting, and, in some measure, of suggestion relative to the welfare of the State.

At this time, with the recent election still fresh in mind, I desire to express to the people of Oregon, through you, their representatives, my sincere appreciation and gratitude for their action in selecting me as their chief executive. The realization of the support and loyalty of my friends, demonstrated at the polls, will always be among the happiest recollections of my life.

But, while appreciating to the utmost degree the honor conferred upon me, I am equally aware of the responsibilities that accompany it, and the difficulties besetting the position which I have been called to fill. And, therefore, it is with nothing of the pride of attainment, but rather with real humility, that I face you at this time of inauguration, realizing fully the difficulties that confront me, and desiring only that strength and wisdom may be forthcoming so that the people of Oregon shall have just cause for satisfaction at the record of their Governor. To prove worthy of the confidence reposed in me is my sole desire.

It is your duty to provide new legislation and amend existing laws for the well-being of the people who have sent you here. In all your deliberations I would urge upon you one paramount consideration, namely, that you constantly remember you are building not solely for today, but for the future. Let the record of this session be one of forward-looking legislation. Oregon is but in her infancy, and more than all else she needs sound assistance in the development of the resources Nature has given her. All that will tend to increase the productivity of her fields, her forests, her streams, and her factories, now and in the future, deserves your enthusiastic attention; and all that
is bound around with petty trafficking or sectional antagonism.  

merits naught from you but disapproval.  

Especially I venture to recommend that this Legislature set  
a record for brevity, particularly in the number of laws passed.  
Nothing in the general situation demands great activity in the  
field of law-making, and assuredly the popular frame of mind  
presages thankfulness for the least possible new legislation.  
A short, sane session, with a few good laws, is at this time  
ininitely preferable to a lengthy assembly, replete with  
drastic changes and burdened with many enactments carelessly  
devised.  

It does not seem to me entirely fitting that a Governor just  
taking office should attempt any comprehensive summary of  
the detailed condition of State affairs.  His lack of personal  
familiarity with the routine of the office naturally would  
make it presumptuous for him to burden you with anything  
pretending to be an accurate recapitulation of the several  
departments during the biennium.  It is rather for me, then, to  
offer suggestions concerning ways and means for the future  
betterment of the State, a work in which we may all cooperate.  

At the outset, I desire you to understand that I appear here  
today seeking no personal favors, and with no inclination  
to exceed the proper limitations of my office.  In short, I have no  
“pet measures,” and have no intention of exerting such power  
as my position may give to influence you unduly.  There exists,  
then, no desire on my part to interfere with the legitimate  
functions of this Legislature.  On the other hand, it seems to  
me the unqualified duty of the Governor to take full advantage  
of his position to express disapproval of legislative action,  
should necessity demand, using his prerogative not as a  
weapon of dictation, but solely to safeguard the public interest.  

In this connection, I venture to point out the dangers of  
postponing legislation until the closing hours of the session,  
when confusion must result from its haphazard consideration.  
It occurs to me further that convenience to the Legislature and  
ultimate profit to the taxpayers would result from the adoption  
of a rule providing that all appropriation bills be presented not  
later, say, than the twentieth day of the session.  

In the consideration of governmental development in Oregon
during the past few years, one fact is clearly apparent; namely, a tendency toward de-centralization. Whatever the immediate causes behind it, this tendency creates a division of authority and in a great measure the apportionment of duties among several officials in place of one. Accompanying this division of authority has come a division of responsibility, which works, it seems to me, quite contrary to the development of the highest efficiency. Furthermore, any tendency involving the employment of several heads instead of one is usually accompanied by extravagance and waste.

While Oregon in a great measure has been dissipating her governmental authority among an increasing number of officials, the trend of scientific legislation elsewhere has been in the opposite direction. Centralization of administration and responsibility is becoming more and more universal; and, apparently, with success.

Unless initiated too drastically, or carried beyond the bounds of good judgment, steps toward reasonable centralization in no wise merit classification as impractical. The tendency has proved its worth in actual operation. Therefore, I deem it wise to express the opinion that Oregon's legislation in the future should be guided by the general rule that centralization is desirable in the administration of State government.

In this connection I think it highly fitting that in several instances offices which are now elective should become appointive. The virtues of such a change are centralization of responsibility and a shorter ballot, which, under our system, are particularly desirable.

Economy probably is the keynote of this Twenty-Eighth Legislative Session; it was the dominant factor in pre-election pledges, and it now devolves upon us to see that these promises are put into practice. All that concerns expenditure merits your most painstaking attention. The principle upon which we should act when State money is concerned is the same as if that money were our own; we should insist upon receiving one hundred cents of value for every dollar expended. Doubtless such advice is hackneyed, and perhaps it savors of pedantry—but, nevertheless, it is disregard of just such a principle that too often discredits public administration. So I respectfully
submit the thought, assuring you that so far as I am concerned it will be my sole guide in whatever connection I may have with the governmental expenditures.

Annual, or continuing, appropriations have come to be regarded widely as unbusinesslike. I heartily approve the suggestion that the policy of making appropriations continuous cease, with the exception of the State's educational institutions, whose interests can be served best where a stated annual income is assured and constructive plans adapted to the amount definitely available. Further, our educational institutions should be relieved of the necessity of biennial campaigns for funds before the Legislature with their attendant likelihood of political bickerings.

At present, State receipts from several sources are segregated under special funds, and can only be paid out for specific purposes. Often no cash is on hand in certain funds, and the State is obliged to issue warrants bearing interest, even when large amounts are lying idle in the Treasury but are not applicable to the expenditures involved. The simple remedy for this waste in unnecessary interest payment is to have all State receipts placed in the General Fund, to be used as required. This would be economical and businesslike, and would in no wise disarrange the existing safeguards of the various funds, whose accounts would be conducted separately, as at present.

Much has been said about the need of economy-legislation directed at the several departments of State government. I heartily concur in the feeling that reforms tending toward economy are desirable in State administration, and no doubt these will receive wise consideration from you. But I venture to point to a field of endeavor even broader; namely, to county administration. During the last few years of each $100 paid in taxes in an average county about $12.50 has gone to the State and approximately $37.50 to the county. In other words, county administration costs the taxpayer three times as much as State. Undeniably, there are many leaks in county government that well may be checked by adequate legislation, and it
is my hope that effort for economy and efficiency will not stop with the State but will proceed to the details of county affairs.

With some hesitancy I call your attention to another field for economy, and one close at hand. The clerical and stenographic force at the last legislative session cost the State $33,932.95, and in this detail showed an increase of more than twenty per cent over the 1911 session. The total cost in 1913, $99,862.85, was more than thirty per cent higher than the 1911 session’s. So far as I am able to determine, there is no sound reason why this Legislature, by commencing its economy program at home, cannot save at least $20,000.

The people of Oregon have decreed, by a decisive vote, that the liquor traffic shall end in the State after January first, 1916. They have imposed upon you the obligation of putting prohibition into effect, and it becomes your duty to provide laws that will actually prohibit the sale and barter of intoxicants. These enactments must neither be so drastic as to be non-enforceable, nor so lax as to be ineffective. In short, your difficult task is to devise ways and means for making, and keeping, Oregon actually a prohibition State, so long as the will of the people shall decree.

While it is for you to provide anti-liquor legislation, it is perhaps well to remind you that in a great measure the enforcement of the laws you enact will be the Governor’s responsibility. Or, I might better say, a general supervision of their enforcement will devolve upon the State’s executive, who ultimately will be held responsible by the people for their satisfactory administration.

Therefore, you are earnestly urged to provide the Governor—or whatever official upon whom may be placed the responsibility—with the means of properly enforcing the prohibition laws. To perform this duty adequately, in my opinion, it will be necessary to amend the Constitution, authorizing him to remove delinquent officers.

Section 19 of Article VII of the Oregon Constitution provides that “public officers shall not be impeached; but incom-
petency, corruption, malfeasance or delinquency in office may be tried in the same manner as criminal offenses, and judgment may be given of dismissal from office, " * * *."

In other words, if officers are remiss in their duties—say a sheriff in enforcing prohibition—he can be reached only through criminal procedure, and often by the time the tedious cure is effected the ill has become historic. To mend this situation I recommend referring to the people a constitutional amendment which would change the section quoted above so as to conform with Section 1 of Article X of the Constitution of the state of New York, which provides that the Governor may remove any sheriff or district attorney within the term for which he is elected, giving such officer a copy of the charges against him and an opportunity to be heard.

To make such supervision of law enforcement practicable, it is essential that funds be provided to defray expenses of investigation or any special action that the Executive may be called upon to undertake. The last Legislature appropriated $1,000 for special agent work during the biennium. I venture to predict that in the future such a sum will prove utterly inadequate, especially after the prohibition amendment goes into effect. In this connection, with all regard for economy, it is worth reminding you that the fruits of such investigation work inevitably are fines which bring far more revenue to the public treasury than the outlay involved, even disregarding the moral obligations of the case.

With the end in view of economy and higher efficiency, the following changes are recommended in certain State departments:

The State Tax Commission may well be abolished, and the work of the present body transferred to the office of the Railroad Commission, which should be given authority to employ an expert in taxation and assessment to conduct this branch of the office. It is my opinion that the scope of work handled by the Railroad Commission makes its title inadvisable and I recommend the substitution of the name “Commission of Public Utilities.”

In the State Industrial Accident Commission there are
three commissioners with an aggregate salary of $10,800 per annum. It is believed that one commissioner with an office force equivalent to the present one could handle the work of this department with satisfaction to the public, and with desirable economy and centralization of responsibility. To effect coordination I suggest the consolidation with the Accident Commission of the Bureau of Labor and the Industrial Welfare Commission. In this readjustment the present Labor Commissioner should remain the responsible head of his department and retain his present salary to the end of his elected term. I further recommend the establishment of a waiting period for investigation before payment of claims, and a broader classification; in connection with needed changes in our law, I earnestly suggest consideration of the Michigan law, which to me seems most excellent. In all that concerns this department it is essential that the interests of the workingman be safeguarded.

I also suggest that the duties of the State Sealer of Weights and Measures be merged with those of the State Dairy and Food Commissioner.

There are now being conducted in Portland three distinct and independent medical laboratories, supported by taxpayers and needlessly duplicating work and piling up expense. To eliminate this condition I recommend the consolidation of the State Board of Health Laboratory with the Pathological Laboratory of the Medical School of the University of Oregon, and, if the authorities of the City of Portland agree to the desirability of the move, it is further urged that the City Laboratory be merged with the two above mentioned under some cooperative arrangement mutually equitable.

The State is at present virtually employing two architects, one at the Capitol and one at the State University. It would seem that in the interest of economy one architect should be sufficient, especially as but extremely little new construction of State buildings will be undertaken during the coming biennium. Therefore, while appreciating fully the admirable work done by the present incumbent, I recommend that the activities of the State Architect's office be merged with those of the University.
The office of State Bank Examiner should be placed under the general jurisdiction of the State Treasurer, eliminating unnecessary overhead charges.

I suggest that the offices of State Engineer and State Highway Engineer be combined, under the State Engineer, who shall have an unsalaried advisory board of three members, especially qualified in road matters, to cooperate with him in all that concerns State highways. Here, again, centralization of responsibility would result, and, I believe, the overhead expense for office and field work of the two branches of State engineering would be materially reduced, and a higher state of efficiency secured.

The above recommendations I have made because it seemed to me that in the several instances involved the need for reform is especially apparent. However, I do not at all feel that the possibility for desirable centralization and governmental improvement ends with these few suggestions. While, no doubt, several feasible plans, looking toward centralization and economy, are now available, affecting certain details of State administration, yet it occurs to me that there is not now time for the thorough investigation which the involved subject properly demands. Therefore, I suggest the appointment of a non-salaried committee, either to be composed of legislative members or to be appointed by the Governor, which shall examine into the subject during the coming biennium and report fully to the next Legislative Assembly its recommendations for securing a more comprehensive reform than could be undertaken wisely at this time.

Wise road-building is probably the best investment the State can undertake, and for its encouragement I recommend consideration of some plan for the establishment and use of a larger State Road Fund. I suggest a one-half mill State tax, the combined revenue of it and the existing (or improved) graduated motor vehicle tax to be expended from the State Treasury in cooperation with the various counties for trunk roads within their boundaries, their construction to be under State supervision.
It is generally conceded that agriculture is our basic industry and if we are to realize a truly Greater Oregon we must lay the foundation by means of constructive legislation for agricultural development. Among the most vital problems of this industry are better roads and cheaper money. Our National Congress apparently may fail to enact rural credit legislation, and it is recommended that this Legislature memorialize Congress to take action on Rural Credit banking laws at the earliest practicable moment. In the meantime, I suggest that effort be made to evolve a rational State mortgage credit system, calling to your attention the fact that today Oregon's farm mortgage indebtedness is approximately $22,000,000. Of this, some $6,000,000 is supplied from the State's irreducible school fund, loaned at six per cent. The average interest paid on the balance is probably eight per cent, the two per cent difference involving an annual burden on Oregon's farmers of $320,000, which, in a great measure, might be eliminated.

In many of our eastern counties, agricultural development is being seriously threatened by a growing pest of rabbits. To those affected, this is a matter of great importance and it deserves serious consideration. I would recommend that a small appropriation be provided for devising ways and means of scientifically combatting the rabbit pest.

The biennial reports of the penal and eleemosynary institutions of the State are before you. As intimated above, I do not deem it within my province at this time to burden you with a lengthy statement dealing with the details of their conduct.

With one exception my investigations have led me to believe that both in physical condition and management the institutions are fairly creditable.

I cannot speak so optimistically concerning the Oregon State Penitentiary. In many respects that establishment is in an unsatisfactory condition. Broadly speaking, its chief demerits are insufficient equipment and the unemployment of its inmates.

During the last month there were 160 men in the Penitentiary without occupation, and there seems fair reason to expect
that the number will increase. Such a condition is contrary to the dictates of humanity and economic wisdom. So far as possible the prisoners should be kept physically sound, and assuredly their labors should be utilized to the utmost, for their own good and that of the taxpayers who are forced to support them.

Two methods of employment within the Penitentiary itself are practicable. One, the manufacture of articles for use in other State institutions, is already developed nearly to the extent of its limited field. The second is production of something not manufactured by free labor elsewhere in Oregon; an example of this policy is found at the Minnesota Penitentiary, where the convicts not only pay their own way but actually show a substantial profit through the manufacture of farm machinery.

Outside the prison walls the convict labor might well be employed in the construction of State highways. Such work would add materially to our assets; it would take nothing from free labor, being construction that otherwise would not, and could not, be undertaken; and it would add but slightly to the cost of the institution, in camp upkeep and extra guards, an increase greatly overbalanced by the benefits derived. Also, the State has some seven hundred acres of stump land and one thousand acres of undrained land all located conveniently to the Penitentiary, which should be grubbed and drained and placed in a high state of cultivation.

Of the 431 inmates of the Penitentiary in December, 309 were serving a first term, and 209 were under thirty years of age. At present there is no way of segregating the youthful first offender from the hardened criminal so that in a great measure the State is conducting a school of crime, as the novice quickly imbibes the spirit of the veteran crook, and much of his knowledge. Sufficient financial assistance should be rendered the institution to alleviate this condition, and make reasonable segregation possible.

It would be wise economy, in the long run, to provide the institution with a larger dairy herd, and to give it more farm land.

The feature of the prison policy of the past which probably
has most concerned the general public has been the tendency toward exaggerated leniency. I desire at this time to state emphatically that it will be the policy of the Governor henceforth to entertain all due respect for judicial decisions, and where judge and jury have passed upon a case and sentence has been pronounced, only under the most exceptional circumstances will I feel warranted in setting aside or seriously modifying such sentence. The abolishment of the death penalty coupled with a growing disposition to regard lightly the binding nature of judicial sentences, instills me with the belief that a more sparing use of the pardoning power will have a salutory effect upon the criminal element, and is demanded in justice to the community at large.

It seems fitting to speak in behalf of one class of sufferers who merit State assistance. I refer to the indigent, crippled or deformed children. Their plight is no less pitiful and deserving than that of the insane or feeble-minded, and far more meritorious than the criminals', whose maintenance is literally forced upon us. Oregon owes something to these little unfortunates, many of whom may blossom forth into notable men and women if only their brains are given the opportunity for development which their bodies can never achieve. I recommend their plight to your thoughtful consideration.

Of late we have devoted large sums to the exploitation of the State's resources. An organized publicity campaign has been conducted, its double purpose to make known Oregon's attractions throughout the world, and to bring settlers and investors to the State. It is my judgment that the time has come to transfer some of this effort into other channels. Rather than continuing so strenuously our endeavor to draw people here, let us devote more of our zeal, and more of our money, in establishing them after they arrive.

Today Oregon's greatest need is payrolls. The development of manufacturing will provide wages for many of our immigrants, and they, in turn, will supply markets which will make profitable the agricultural development undertaken by others.
The situation we face at this time is bright with opportunities. It is a matter of common knowledge that the European war has crippled manufacture across the Atlantic so desperately that recovery will require years. This has meant, in many instances, that we of America are thrown upon our own resources and obliged to undertake the manufacture at home of countless articles and products for which formerly we have looked to Europe exclusively. The war has been educational in this respect; it is teaching us the possibilities of our own country. One of its results on our continent will be to give a fresh, vital meaning to the phrase “Made in America”—and it is my sincere hope that by proper action and foresight now we can broaden the field of products bearing the stamp “Made in Oregon.”

I propose that you authorize the appointment of an unsalaried committee of seven experienced business men whose duty it shall be to investigate the possibilities of profit to Oregon’s existing institutions, and the establishment of new Oregon industries, created by the pending changes in international trade and manufacture due to the European war, the shifting economic conditions produced by the Panama Canal, and our rapidly enlarging commercial openings in South America and the Orient. And I suggest that some portion of the money hitherto devoted to publicity be placed at the disposal of this committee for the employment of an expert who shall devote his time to its work, under the supervision of its members.

In other directions we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to promote and encourage commercial investment and development in the State. By overwhelming votes at the last election the people evidenced their hostility to drastic legislation likely to harass legitimate business enterprise. The indication should be followed. Unreasonable restrictions on commercial activities should be frowned upon, and every effort made toward the speedy and fair development of Oregon’s resources.

Under this general head it seems advisable reference should be made to the office of Corporation Commissioner. During the biennium this department has produced a profit of more
than $400,000 in fees collected over and above expenses. While such revenue is admirable the fact should not be ignored that the primary function of this bureau is not the creation of revenue but protection of investors and the general public. It is most unwise, it seems to me, that unduly harassing restrictions be imposed upon corporate activity, for nothing that tends to discourage legitimate investment should be sanctioned. Further, it appears that in some directions there is a tendency to inflict hardship upon business enterprise by requiring too many and too exhaustive reports, the cost of whose preparation must ultimately be borne by the taxpayer.

The public schools are truly the bulwark of our civilization, and, as such, merit our most hearty interest and support. The rural schools are suffering for the want of efficient teachers, nor is it difficult to ascertain why. Each year Oregon requires over one thousand trained instructors, but we produce, through our Normal School, but approximately one-tenth of that number. Therefore, it seems to me good business for Oregon schools and for Oregon taxpayers in the final analysis that more generous support be lent to our institutions for the training of teachers here in Oregon.

The State University, Agricultural College and Normal School are doing excellent work and are receiving generous support. I would suggest, however, to the Boards of Regents of these institutions that the most rigid economy commensurate with efficiency be observed. It seems most desirable that the cost to students be kept at the minimum, so that every encouragement may be offered to the young men and women of moderate means to avail themselves of the educational opportunities the State offers.

A subject that I would touch upon in passing is one which we are prone to treat with too little consideration—the development of a citizen soldiery for the purpose of national defense. While this matter, in its essence, is a national problem, yet under our system of government a serious duty falls upon the several states and territories—that of providing
a reserve of trained men for defense should the calamity of war be visited upon us. To this end the citizen soldiery should have the sympathy and support of the people. A system of constabulary or State police should be formulated, independent of the citizen soldiery, so that these men may be left free in the work of preparing themselves for the needs of national defense. Such a system, I believe, is easily within our grasp and is desirable.

Irrigation is a matter of vital importance to large areas of Oregon. The extent of its beneficial possibilities is hardly beginning to be realized, while at the same time its problems are becoming better understood. With the experience of the past to draw upon, and by following a policy of careful development with strict safeguarding of the rights of the man on the land—until recently considered too little—there is every reason to hope for the establishment of an irrigation situation reasonably satisfactory to settler and investor.

Under the supervision of the Desert Land Board, Oregon has just completed, with considerable credit, the first irrigation project ever built by a State. It is now for you to provide legislation governing the maintenance of that project. I earnestly hope that the rules devised will insure business methods, and to me it seems desirable that so far as feasible the affairs of the project be left in the settlers' hands, rather than have them become a minor detail of some governmental department. I further suggest that the funds received by the State from the sale of Tumalo lands be segregated in a revolving fund, to be utilized at some future time for further irrigation aid, under State supervision; interest at all times, however, to be paid the State for the $450,000 originally advanced.

For the department of fish and game I bespeak your friendly consideration. The commercial fisheries provide our third greatest industry, and everything that can be done, on a business basis, toward the natural and artificial propagation of fish and their protection is entitled to support. From the standpoint of recreation the resources of the State in fish and
game are of great consequence, and should continue to be, as they are today, one of Oregon's strongest attractions to the visitor as well as a healthful boon to the resident.

In the conduct of this department strict economy and businesslike procedure are essential, not only on behalf of the taxpayer, but in justice to the work itself, whose continuance upon a worthy scale can only thus be assured. Whatever method may be followed in handling the revenue derived from fish and game licenses, it is my opinion that justice to the sportsmen of the State, who exclusively provide this money, demands that it should be expended for fish and game propagation and protection. Centralization of administration and responsibility in this department, as in others, is highly desirable.

Legislation permitting the establishment of hydro-electric power districts would tend, I believe, to a speedier development of the State. I would favor the creation of districts somewhat along the line of existing irrigation district procedure, whereby groups of individuals in a community may band together for the cooperative development of the waterpower resources of their neighborhood. By such a pooling of interest and community-bonding, so to speak, small communities and farmers could put to beneficial use natural resources now entirely wasted. The same method could also be applied in the reclamation of unimproved areas, notably stump and undrained land, by the establishment of some system of land-improvement districts.

The important events of this summer on the Pacific Coast are the expositions in California. The last Legislature provided for Oregon's representation at San Francisco with reasonable generosity. As these great fairs in our sister state mean much to us through their exploitation of the entire Coast, as an exhibition place for our own resources, and in the travel they will bring to Oregon, I hope that nothing will be done now to diminish our opportunity of making a brilliant showing at San Francisco. Especially is this desirable in view of California's generous consideration of our own Lewis and Clark
Fair. So through you I urge the people of Oregon to participate in California's season of celebration to the fullest degree.

There is much more that might be said, and with propriety. But rather than burden you further with formal utterances, I shall refer simply to the present happy situation of the State of Oregon. Surely there is cause for infinite gratitude and thanksgiving among us now, when God smiles here upon a land of peaceful plenty, while so much of the world is plunged in warfare and want.

With an administrative platform based on fundamental State development, sane economy and honest, businesslike procedure, I now close this, my first message. And in closing I desire to express to you my confidence in the exceptional ability and high purpose of this Twenty-Eighth Legislative Assembly, and to reiterate my earnest desire of cooperating with you, and all the officers of the State, to the utmost of my ability.

I have purposely made this message far briefer than has been customary, seeking rather to have it echo something of my hopes for the future than to be a wearisome recapitulation of the past. It has, at least, conveyed to you and the people of Oregon my deep sense of appreciation for the honor and responsibility that have been given me.

JAMES WITHYCOMBE,
Governor.