

Governor's speech to the Joint Session of the General Assembly, Harrisburg, January 6, 1981 (10:57)

[Applause]

>> Thornburgh: Thank you. Since the opportunity is so rare, I would like first to direct a few words to the families that are gathered here today. Those of you who are fathers or mothers or wives or husbands or sons or daughters are now a part of this great assembly. You'll have a special role in shaping its destiny and that of Pennsylvania and perhaps of the nation, as well. How you accept that role may well mean the difference between a legislator who thrives and one who merely survives. It may mean the difference between a lawmaker who has the time to think and reflect and one who merely casts a vote. It may even mean the difference between a leader, who rides the wind, and a follower, who merely creates a draft. As your favorite members of this body go about the work of the people, I hope you'll be tolerant of their hours, for the hours seldom will make sense. I hope you'll be understanding of their moods, for the contest of ideas can create hurricanes of emotion. And I hope you'll be attentive to their fears as well as their dreams, for they will surely each be reflected in the laws that govern us all.

Advice and support of friends and family are important to any legislative body, regardless of time or situation. But this particular time and this particular situation will require something extra from each and every one of us. For Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, and members of the General Assembly, I believe I welcome you today to one of those special intervals in public life, when what follows may never be quite the same as what has gone before. People of this state have joined the people of this nation in demanding that the federal government mind its own business better and leave the rest of us to mind our own. And surely we can agree with that.

[Applause]

The next president of the United States and the new majority in the United States Senate seem to believe that we have expected too much too often for too long out of Washington. And surely we can agree with that. There are those who believe that much of what we have assigned to Washington would be better placed in the hands of those units of government that are closer to the people. And surely we can agree with that. If we can assume, however, that the federal government will no longer be riding our backs, we must also assume that federal dollars will no longer be backing our

ride. If we can assume that greater powers are about to be returned to the people, through our state and local governments, we must also assume that greater burdens will be placed on those governments through the growing needs of the people.

And the question we must ask ourselves throughout this session now before you is a serious one indeed. Are we ready in Pennsylvania, really ready, to carry out the awesome responsibilities of a resurgent federalism? Thanks in part to the work of the General Assembly that preceded you, we're in a far better position to cope with this challenge than we might have been. Your predecessors deserve a great deal of credit for helping us define the path to a state government that is lean and clean and effective, for that is the only kind of government that can survive the test of the difficult years ahead. But if yesterday's Legislature helped turned Pennsylvania government around, today's has the opportunity to turn Pennsylvania itself around, and I hope and believe that you will make the best of it. I don't intend to burden you with a laundry list of specifics this afternoon. There will be plenty of time for that.

There are, however, some areas of concern I'd like to share with you, areas in which a partnership of performance will clearly be in the best interests of us all. First is the rise in violent crime. While Pennsylvania's battle against white-collar crime and public corruption has produced encouraging victories over the past two years, we're reminded on a daily basis that thugs and hoodlums and other misfits continue to prey on law-abiding Pennsylvanians of every age, race, sex, and economic condition. When fear intimidates the citizen more than the criminal, something is very wrong. I suggest that our system of corrections does not receive the attention it deserves in Pennsylvania, and I suggest again that we must upgrade it to a Cabinet-level department. I suggest our system of parole has contributed to public distrust of criminal justice in Pennsylvania, and I will be submitting specific proposals to you to change it. I suggest that the people themselves can be better trained in safe methods of crime prevention, and I suggest we do more than ever to train them. I suggest that we find out why violent crime has risen, for example, nearly 20% in Philadelphia alone and that we do everything possible that we can to guarantee that first civil right of all Pennsylvanians, the right to be free from fear on their streets and in their homes.

The second imperative before us now is fiscal integrity. While Pennsylvania's battle against waste, fraud, and budgetary chaos has also produced significant victories in the past two years, we

haven't yet kicked the habit of trying to spend money that isn't there. That's why the words of one of my illustrious predecessors, the late Governor David L. Lawrence, have as much meaning today as when they were first uttered in this chamber 18 years ago.

"Unglamorous though budget balancing may be," he said, "it is the cornerstone of good state government." Governor Lawrence warned in 1963 that we must avoid, and I quote, "appropriation of state funds when there is no money available to foot the bill." Nearly two decades later, we have yet to match our dreams and our means in Pennsylvania. Two problems in particular represent the major legacy of unfinished business left to you by your predecessors -- the uncontrolled and financially unsupportable growth of our welfare rolls and the underfinanced and clearly indispensable reconstruction of our highways and bridges.

I have suggested answers to these problems in the past, and I intend to do so again. We must develop a consensus on welfare reform that's compassionate but effective and a strategy for bridge and highway reconstruction that is far-reaching but sound. And we must do so as quickly as possible, for clearing these decks will free us for the task that can make or break this commonwealth -- the preservation and expansion of educational and economic opportunities for all Pennsylvanians. Our concerns with fiscal integrity, after all, are not some latter-day robber baron's fixation with the bottom line. They represent, instead, a passion for jobs and for human dignity. They represent a recognition that social progress and fiscal responsibility must go hand in hand in this era of limited resources. If Pennsylvania falters or fails or loses its jobs and its children to the Sun Belt, people won't ask if it was the east or the west or the Republicans or the Democrats or the liberals or the conservatives or, for that matter, the governor or the legislature that failed this commonwealth. They'll simply remember that this was the time when it happened and that we were the generation of leaders who allowed it to happen. Never has it been more important for all of us to work together on problems that know no regional and no partisan bounds.

We share special charges in the era of resurgent federalism that seems to be thrust upon us. They are charges that place a premium on statesmanship and wisdom and require leadership that overcomes the barriers of party, of personality, and of region. I see that kind of leadership on both sides of the aisle today, in Matt Ryan as the speaker of the House, in Sam Hayes as your majority leader, and in Leroy Irvis as your minority leader. I can see it in Henry Hager, as president pro tempore of the Senate, in Bob Jubelier as majority leader, and in Ed Zemprelli as minority leader of that house, and in many others of you, as well. I see in this chamber

the seeds of a partnership of performance that can overcome the problems we face today, and I see Pennsylvanians in this room who are dedicated to turning things around for themselves, our commonwealth, and our people. It is with honor, with pleasure, and, above all, with hope that I welcome you to what may well become the most important work of your lives. Thank you for the opportunity to extend my greetings. Please accept my congratulations. Godspeed and good luck. Thank you.

[Applause]