

**MESSAGE OF GOVERNOR SILAS
A. HOLCOMB TO THE TWENTY-
FIFTH SESSION OF THE
LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA.
JANUARY 7TH, 1897**

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OF

Governor Silas A. Holcomb

TO THE

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

OF THE

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA.

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January 7th, 1897.

*To the Members of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Legislature
of Nebraska:*

GENTLEMEN: In the discharge of the obligation imposed on me as the Chief Executive of the state to communicate to you such information and recommendations as may suggest themselves, I deem it not inappropriate to express my gratification that this message is presented to a legislative body, a majority of the members of which, I have every reason to believe are in harmony and sympathy with the executive department; and, that we can hopefully look for a hearty accord between the executive and legislative branches of this state government in the respective capacities to which we, the servants of the people, have been chosen by their suffrages to act, respecting the plans to be adopted and the policies we shall pursue. The existence of such harmonious relations will, I am sure, enable us to accomplish much good for our state. I feel confident that every branch of our state government is imbued with an earnest desire to promote the general welfare of our people, advance the prosperity of the state; guard, protect and encourage every interest which will add to the development of its resources and preserve the rights of its citizens.

I feel a deep sense of gratitude to my fellow citizens for the confidence manifested in me by my re-election, and desire only in the future to profit by the experience of the past and thus prove myself worthy of the high honor bestowed upon me.

In administering the affairs of the people in a government such as ours, those chosen for that purpose are but instruments to ascertain and then carry out the will of the people. This should be done with diligence and fidelity. The faithful servant merits and receives the approval of a sovereign people, and enjoys the satisfaction of mind which comes from the knowledge of a duty well performed in the discharge of weighty responsibilities. That the members of this legislature are impressed with the grave responsibilities resting upon each of them, and with the importance of the varied interests of this commonwealth which are for a time committed to their care, I believe and shall assume to be true; that you are determined to

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discharge your duties faithfully and fearlessly for the best interests of our beloved state and the welfare of our fellow citizens, I doubt not in the least.

You will doubtless be called upon to solve many difficult and perplexing problems of grave interest to the state, and I feel sure you will give to each important question, as it is brought before you, that mature deliberation and wise consideration which should characterize all legislation affecting the welfare of a great commonwealth.

I am not, in my judgment, overstating the case when I say that at no time in the history of the state has there been more urgent need for wise and intelligent action on the part of the law-making body; nor a more opportune time for the enactment of prudent legislation. Abuses and imperfections in existing statutes, which permit of inequalities, wrongs and hardships upon a part of our people, should be corrected, bearing ever in mind that the object of all honest legislation is to entirely eradicate, or reduce to a minimum, these various forms of evil in the enforcement of law and order.

As a nation we confidently assert that our people are among the most enlightened and progressive on the face of the earth; and you have the honor to represent the people of a state having the smallest percentage of illiteracy of any in the union, and who are the peer of any people in the land, in patriotism, intelligence, integrity and love of equality, truth and justice in the affairs of mankind.

Our public schools, colleges and universities testify to the love of our people for education. Situated geographically in the center of the United States, we are afforded every opportunity for constant and mutually profitable intercourse with all parts of our common country. It is to be regretted that partisan newspapers, having seemingly no regard for the public welfare and with a spirit of intolerance entirely out of place where free institutions are admired, have attempted to prejudice the minds of men who are unacquainted with our state and its citizens, by the publication of mendacious and slanderous articles reflecting on the intelligence and integrity of the people of Nebraska. It has been intimated by men high in the councils of our national government, as well as by some newspapers of general circulation throughout the country, that the

present session of the legislature of Nebraska would undertake, by vicious and hostile legislation, to permit the repudiation of the debts of its citizens, to vitiate private contracts and to discriminate in favor of one party to a contract so as to demoralize the business of the people of the state. These wanton attacks upon the free and enlightened people of Nebraska would not be worthy of attention were they not calculated to incite the ill-will of a class of citizens of older and more populous states whose knowledge of Nebraskans is gleaned from newspaper comment, and not from actual contact with our people. It has been threatened that the people of eastern states who have money invested in Nebraska property would withdraw their investments because the majority of our citizens have espoused a different political policy from that having general endorsement in the eastern portion of our country.

These unmerited reflections on the intelligence and integrity of our citizens will not, I am sure, deter you from discharging your full duty to your constituents by enacting any new laws or remedial legislation upon which you may determine. By wise and judicious action, you will dispel any doubts which may exist of the determination of our people to be strictly just to all men; of their capacity, through their representatives, to enact legislation for the protection of all interests in the intimate relations of our own citizens with each other, or with the citizens of other states, and for the conservation of all legitimate business interests.

Nebraska is not the child of any other state or group of states. She is a sovereign state among the sisterhood of states of the union, with equal privileges, prerogatives, duties and responsibilities. Her citizens are intelligent, industrious, honest and patriotic. She has within her borders the natural and acquired resources and all the elements of strength and grandeur necessary to maintain her proud position as one of the foremost states of the union. Nebraskans demand only the right, and that they will maintain, of governing their own affairs, without any desire to infringe upon the rights of any other people.

A sudden change in the business relations existing between citizens of Nebraska and citizens of other states would quite probably work much hardship and unnecessary suffering upon many of our people, yet I am of the opinion that ultimately

greater permanent injury would be wrought to the states and communities adopting such an extraordinary and unusual course towards our citizens. Nebraska is not dependent on any one state or section of the country for the final or complete development of her resources and the comfort and happiness of her citizens; and she does not appeal as a dependent to have accorded to her citizens the fair treatment and consideration which should, and usually does, exist among the people of one common country, all having a mutual interest in the development of the whole. Rather, she demands this treatment because of the elements of strength in reciprocal relations which she possesses, and the ability of extending inducements to the business world, which make her territory an inviting field for the investment of capital and development of industrial enterprises.

That all property interests now in existence or that may hereafter be established, will be treated with sacred regard and scrupulous honesty should not be questioned. To question it is to doubt the honesty of mankind and challenge the integrity of a nation. Our people deserve friendly relations, commercially and socially, with the citizens of other states, and realize that in the maintenance and extension of mutual, cordial regard, all are alike benefitted.

One and a quarter millions of patriotic, law-abiding people inhabit the State of Nebraska. They have builded thriving cities and villages. They have broken the sod over which the Indian and the buffalo roamed a few decades ago. They are a hardy, independent people, and are proud of the great and growing commonwealth they have created. The fertile fields of Nebraska yield grain sufficient to supply the nation. Horses, cattle, and sheep fatten upon her broad prairies and meadow lands. Thousands of car-loads of pork are shipped annually from her farms to feed the people of other states and countries. Her transportation facilities are unexcelled. She has factories for sugar, for chicory, for the manufacture of dry goods and various other commodities. She has mills for grinding grain; great packing houses and dairies all over the state—in fact everything which makes a people prosperous in a great agricultural country, and goes to build up a great commonwealth.

These are the advantages which an intelligent, industrious, thrifty and energetic people present to the business world, and they will enable her to maintain, by virtue of merit alone, an honorable position among the great industrial communities of our country.

The more important of the subjects to be considered by you were generally discussed during the recent campaign and the people made known their desires by the election of officers committed to reforms in the management of the state's affairs, thereby rendering it less difficult for you to perform your duty in executing the will of the people thus expressed. I will merely call your attention to such of these important matters as have come under my observation during my term of office.

By a wise provision of the constitution, the officers of the executive department and the heads of all of the public institutions of the state, are required at least ten days preceding each regular session of the legislature to make a report to the Governor concerning the condition of the state's business in their charge, such reports in turn to be submitted to the legislature. These reports were not all presented to me within the time required by the constitution, and I have therefore been unable to give them the consideration I would have desired. They are submitted to you for your careful consideration as they contain much valuable information which will be of great assistance to you in determining the needs of the different departments of the state government and of the various institutions for their proper management for the coming biennium.

RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE.

One of the most important duties devolving upon you as legislators is the amendment of the election laws of the state. The legislature of 1891 very wisely adopted the Australian ballot system and it has undoubtedly had an appreciable effect in purifying our elections. Experience in the use of the Australian system suggests many improvements which will have a tendency to render the perpetration of frauds still more difficult and give additional protection to the voter in the exercise of his right of franchise.

I heartily approve of the general form of our ballot and believe it to be vastly preferable to the so-called "blanket".

ballot system, in which the party tickets are each printed in separate columns, with provisions generally by which the elector can vote the entire party ticket by one mark or stamp. The independence of the voter is encouraged by our system which leads him usually to read the names of the candidates for the various offices before casting his ballot, and he is encouraged thereby not to rely solely upon party designation. It has been urged by some as an objection to the form of our ballot that it is in effect the establishment of an educational test for voting. I do not regard this as a very serious objection. The voter has become accustomed to this form of ballot and any marked change in the general form, in my opinion, is entirely unnecessary and would serve no good purpose.

Other objections, however, are more substantial which I regard more the result of abuses than of the law itself and which can be remedied by proper amendments. As an instance, William J. Bryan was nominated by the democratic party for the presidency. Afterward he was also nominated by the peoples' party for president. A convention of dissatisfied democrats met later and, styling themselves "National Democrats" nominated John M. Palmer for president. The candidates placed in nomination by the Palmer wing for electors, as well as for state offices, were denominated on the official ballot in Nebraska as "democrats" with no means of distinguishing them from the regular democratic nominees. The result of such a course was necessarily the deception of many voters. I would respectfully recommend that such amendments be made to the law as would prevent the use of the party designation by "bolting" factions for the purpose of deceiving voters. The regular party nominees only should appear on the official ballot with the designation of the party which nominated them. Where one candidate has been nominated by more than one political party, the party designations should be so arranged as to permit the elector to express by his vote his party preference as well as his preference for the candidate. Protection should be secured to the voter who, unacquainted with the names of all the nominees on the ticket, is desirous of casting his ballot for the nominees of the party he espouses.

I would also suggest that each party having a fair proportion of the electors in the state be given representation on