

JAMES H. DOUGLAS
GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR'S STATEMENT

I want to thank all of you for coming this morning.

I especially want to thank the members of my Administration for being here, as well as my staff.

Since January 1973, after I was first elected to the Vermont House, I've been making the trip over the Appalachian Gap from my home in Middlebury to serve the people in Montpelier.

I've traversed that pass at all hours, in all seasons, through rain, snow and sun. On a clear day, I can look west over the Champlain basin and east toward the Connecticut River valley, out across the breadth of this place that is like no other. And each time I reach the top, I am reminded of the sturdy shoulders of our people – as strong and as solid as the hills – and my hope for Vermont is renewed.

Through my years in public service, I have had the great opportunity to share with my fellow Vermonters their proud achievements and the joys of daily life in Vermont: the opening of a new business in St. Johnsbury, pancakes with little leaguers in Starksboro, celebrating our traditions with farmers and sugarmakers at Dairy Days and the Maple Festival, waving the green flag at Thunder Road, and helping to welcome home a local hero, Captain Richard Phillips.

The rewards of this job are many, like joining hands in service to help improve the lives of our friends and neighbors: delivering meals to homebound seniors in Orange County, celebrating National Night Out in South Burlington, marching to Prevent Child Abuse in Montpelier, splitting wood to heat needy homes in Springfield, or helping to load nearly 70 18-wheelers with donated goods bound for the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

And it's an honor to be with Vermonters during their times of trial and hardship: touring the devastations from floods, storms and fires, meeting with employees after a plant closure, or holding the hand of a Gold Star Mother or Wife.

These occasions have given me the opportunity to speak with Vermonters, to hear their fears and troubles, their hopes and ideas. I've brought them back with me to Montpelier – where government has responded.

We've charted a course for our state that will bring good job opportunities, more affordable homes, safer communities and clean air and water.

I've made health care reform a priority – reaching across party lines to get the job done – because it continues to be a burden on the pocketbooks of hard-working Vermonters. We implemented the Blueprint for Health to help people lead healthier lives and reduce health care costs. Because of our first-of-its-kind Global Commitment waiver, we are a leader in forward-thinking, innovative health system reform. And Catamount Health is bringing health care within reach of more Vermonters.

As Chairman of the National Governors Association I'm taking our successes to Washington to demonstrate how real reform can be achieved.

I've pushed to make higher education more affordable – through Promise Scholarships and the Next Generation Initiative – so young people can go to school here, lead the next wave of innovation in our state and create new economic opportunities.

A steady and reliable infrastructure is essential if we are going to compete in a changing economy. The e-State initiative will ensure that all Vermonters have access to broadband and cell service. And our efforts to increase and target investments in our roads, rails, bridges and culverts have been critical.

The actions we've taken to prevent and treat drug abuse; combat sexual violence; and support law enforcement, fire fighters, first responders and other public safety professionals, are making our communities safer.

I am proud to carry on Vermont's long-held commitment to our environment. We've taken bold steps to clean up Lake Champlain and other impaired waterways. We've fought to keep our air clean, even if it meant fighting Washington and the automobile industry on emissions standards. We were a leader in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, because passing along a healthy environment to the next generation requires reaching outside our borders and working with our neighbors in the region and, indeed, around the world.

And I've fought to hold the line on taxes and spending, so that we can sustain the necessary functions of government for future generations and encourage new economic opportunities. Fiscal responsibility is at the core of the Vermont ethic – as we face budget challenges resulting from the global recession, Vermonters deserve to see their money spent wisely and their government managed efficiently.

There is no doubt that over the past seven years we have accomplished much. We've seen this state through some tough times in our nation's history – and I will continue to work day and night so that we emerge stronger than before.

I am so proud of what we have accomplished. And yet there will always be more to do.

The work of democracy is an abiding, beautiful struggle – just as it should be. This land, our freedom, our liberty was not easily won and so it is worth the sacrifice we must give to maintain it. It rightly demands our hard work, perpetual motion, and an endless flow of human energy and high ideals – the very lifeblood of the Vermont soul. All across our state – from armories to local food pantries, from town halls to under this golden dome – Vermonters give deeply and selflessly, each singular act of service renewing the promise of Vermont.

It has been the great privilege of my life to serve the people of this state that I love so well. I have been profoundly humbled by their faith and support in me.

But as any farmer knows, after many years – working sun up to sun down, seven days a week – there comes a time to turn over the reins to fresh arms. For me, that time is approaching. After 36 years as a public servant, 28 of those years in statewide office, with what will be eight years as Governor – and through 15 statewide elections – I will have held center stage long enough for any leader. I will not seek another term as Governor of Vermont.

My service to this state will not end with the governorship. Whether I'm in the corner office or my home office, I will always strive to do what I can to make better this great state.

But I am also ready to write a new chapter in my life. When I first took my seat as the Representative from Middlebury in 1973, I was a young man right out of college. With some very good fortune, I met and married Dorothy, soon we were raising two extraordinary boys, and now one of my sons has a son of his own – our first grandchild: Timothy James Douglas. A new generation has a way of putting things into perspective.

I know there will be some speculation as to what is next, so I want to lay a few questions to rest immediately. I am not running for President. Dorothy has a divorce lawyer on speed dial if I ever utter that crazy idea.

I'm not running for the US Senate, the US House or any other statewide office in 2010.

However, for the next 16 months, I am running state government.

Those who presume there will be an absentee landlord in the corner office will be mistaken. I will focus as intensely as I always do on the needs of Vermonters. And I will continue to fight everyday to put this state on firm footing. Now is not the time to rest on our laurels.

I will continue the good work that my Administration has done to advance an Agenda of Affordability – an agenda centered on growing good-paying jobs while protecting our cherished natural resources.

This is a historic time for our state. Vermont has been hit hard by the global recession. Businesses, families and even state government have felt the impact of a shrinking economy.

That is why we must act responsibly to rein in state spending to ensure that Vermonters can continue to fund the programs and services we are all so proud to support – especially those for the frail and neediest. In order to do that, we must build and pass budgets that are sustainable for the long term.

I will continue to fight for working Vermonters and small business owners who struggle to make ends meet by resisting efforts to raise taxes to grow government and increase spending.

As I always have – but now let there be no doubt – I will fight to do what is best for Vermont and devote my full energy to guiding this great state toward a more prosperous future.

At another hour, in another place, there will be plenty of time for remembrances and time to look back. Now it is time to look ahead to the next legislative session and budget cycle, because, as I've said before, the choices we make today as our state struggles under the weight of this recession will have a lasting and real impact on how quickly we recover.

There will also be a time and a place for the long list of thank yous, but for today, there are just a few. My thanks to Dorothy for her love, devotion, and unconditional support over the years.

I want to thank my Administration for your dedication to serving the public and for making government more responsive.

I want to thank Lieutenant Governor Dubie for his friendship, support and leadership.

And to the people of Vermont, thank you for your continued confidence. I especially want to thank of you have who have offered ideas, concerns, frustrations and encouragement to me in my travels over the years. You have given state government a truly people-driven direction and focus. Thank you for the tremendous privilege of allowing me to serve.

And with that, I'd like to ask my team to "get back to work!" We've got a lot to do.