

Asa Hutchinson, 46th Governor of Arkansas  
Inaugural Speech | Steps of the Arkansas State Capitol  
Noon, January 15, 2019

Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the General Assembly, Constitutional Officers; and the people of Arkansas.

With gratitude and in a spirit of humility, I enter my 2nd term as the 46th Governor of Arkansas. I want to recognize my family. My wife and wonderful First Lady, Susan, who has devoted herself to helping those children of our state who have experienced abuse or neglect.

My sons, Asa III; John Paul and Nubia; and Seth and Julia. My daughter Sarah and Dave. My grandchildren, Ella Beth; Malcolm; Isabella; and Pablo. I have two who are not here, and we will miss them, Asa IV and Abel. My family is important to me, and I am grateful they are here for this important occasion.

I want to extend a special welcome to the many foreign dignitaries who are with us. Consul generals, ambassadors and business leaders, welcome and thanks for coming to this important occasion in Arkansas.

In the course of time, there are special moments where life and history are intertwined. This day is one of them.

The experiences of my life have prepared me for the responsibilities of leading this state; and the story of Arkansas has brought us to this moment. It is a moment in time where we can leave our imprint on history. The moment is here, but the history is yet to be determined.

While we are dependent upon a Sovereign God who reigns in the affairs of man, it is up to us to shape our future and to make the most of freedom's bounty. We are here today because the people of Arkansas have entrusted us to make the right decisions; to act on their behalf; and to serve with integrity.

For those in public service, we should have two constant companions.

The first companion is principle. Principles of life that come from faith, hard work, responsibility and compassion. These principles run deep in the Arkansas fertile delta; they are forged in the rocky hills of our Northwest; and they are respected in the pine woods of our Southland. While we all stumble in life, it is our faith, sense of responsibility, and compassion that will get us back on course.

The second companion is the public trust. The voters who put us in office expect their elected officials to listen and to be informed; to follow principles and the voice of reason. The people's trust is important to me and will serve as my constant companion throughout the next four years.

We all agree that Arkansas is an amazing place to live, raise a family, and build our own special future.

It hasn't always been easy. Arkansans have had our share of challenge and difficulty. The most challenging time was during the Great Depression, but even during that time of challenge, our state did not lose population. People stayed here because the poverty was all across the nation.

But when the economy boomed again after the war, the jobs out of state offered better pay. Between 1940 and 1960, over 150,000 people left our state.

Some of our best left for Michigan, California and Chicago. But now, the trend is reversed. People are moving *to* Arkansas from California, Michigan, and Illinois. And we are retaining our homegrown talent. We are now over 3 million people and growing every day.

The lesson is that people follow opportunity and pursue quality of life. We have it all. From our treasured Buffalo River to the beauty of a sunrise in the Arkansas Delta, we have it all. That is why we work so hard to be competitive in our tax rates; to fight for industry and businesses locating in this state; to build a technology sector; to expand tourism; and to improve access to the arts and to education.

As evidence of these new opportunities, we have moved more than 65,000 Arkansans out of poverty. They have jobs and are making more money. And fewer Arkansans are on social benefits—they are working.

And we have proven that we can lead in entrepreneurship; agriculture; global retail trade; and technology education.

You might ask why growth, opportunity, and education are so important. Our thinking is often shaped by our life experiences, and a quick glance at my life explains my passion.

I was born to John Malcolm and Coral Hutchinson, the youngest of six children. My mom and dad were hard-working farmers who did not have a college degree. But they valued learning and worked hard so their children could have more opportunities in life. I am delighted that many of my siblings are here today, and I take pride in our heritage and what we have been given.

I enjoy talking with young people, and they often ask when did you decide you wanted to be governor.

Of course, they are thinking I planned all of this out early in life. The truth is that when I was in the 5th grade, I wanted to be a farmer like Dad on Spavinaw Creek.

When I was in high school in Springdale, I worked in Welch's Grape Juice Factory. I was happy there, and I had no real plans beyond high school.

I was persuaded to go to college, but I did not know what I wanted to do in life. I picked my major, accounting, because it was the first major listed alphabetically.

My senior year, I was inspired by a debate topic on government wire-tapping and went to law school. My dream was to become a lawyer who helped people and served the cause of justice. The desire to impact my community led me to run for political office. It was much later in life that I dreamed about the possibility of running for Governor.

In my life, it was education that inspired me and gave me the life-long desire to learn. And education gave me opportunities I never dreamed would be open to me.

And so when I speak to the next generation, I remind them that life is not always planned; but in some instances, it unfolds. It unfolds in unexpected ways as learning leads to opportunity.

In the last four years, we have improved opportunities in Arkansas through education.

Four years ago, I said we needed to teach computer science in every high school in Arkansas. Today, Arkansas leads the nation in computer science education. It started as an idea, a modest investment, and legislative support. It now sets an example for states from California to North Carolina.

We have focused on a reading initiative so that students in grade 3 will be reading at grade level. Fundamental principle. It is our Reading Initiative for Student Excellence or RISE. RISE is in over 300 schools, and it is creating a culture of reading with our students that will form the foundation for a lifetime of learning and opportunity. As Governor, I have marketed the state of Arkansas on the global stage. I have been to Cuba. I have been to Germany. I have been to China. I have been to Japan. But you know where I first visited those countries? It was through books as I was learning and growing up. It is reading that is fundamental to all of the learning that we enjoy.

We have raised teacher salaries; adopted a higher-education funding formula that rewards student progress and achievement; and transformed secondary education to offer students a chance to pursue their dreams through workforce training.

While we have invested more in education, we have a mandate to maintain a balanced budget. We have done more than that. Working with the legislature, for the first time the state has a real savings plan.

We have changed our state budget from one that spends it all to one that creates savings for more difficult times. We now have the Long-Term Reserve Fund. The current balance is over \$125 million.

I like to learn from history. Through history, we know that our future is brightest when government does not stand in the way of entrepreneurs, and small business owners that want to grow and create jobs.

Over the past four years, we have done exactly that with more than 80,000 jobs being created by industries locating in Arkansas or expanding in this state.

Our job is to create an environment in this state that encourages and rewards job creation and higher wages.

I have always promoted a growth agenda for Arkansas, and the people understand the energy and hope that it brings. We cannot let them down. And that brings us to this time in the story of our state.

Let's not let this moment in history pass us by but let us work together for success.

Together, let's make history: by reversing the trend of high taxes in Arkansas; by transforming state government; by raising teacher pay to historic levels; and by focusing on a growth agenda that allows Arkansans to prosper.

Yes, today is just a moment in time where life and history are intertwined.

Governing is shaped by the times in which we live. For our first president, George Washington, it was forming a new government and setting a pattern of selfless service.

For our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, it was preserving the union through his own resolve and sacrifice.

For Franklin D. Roosevelt, it was bringing our nation safely through depression and war; for Ronald Reagan, it was the need for an economic resurgence and winning the Cold War; For George W. Bush, it was the 9/11 attack and fighting the global war on terrorism.

How will our moment in history be defined by the time in which we live? We only see in part now, and what we see is exciting and filled with opportunity.

We live in a time of technology, and we are preparing our young people to not only work in the tech industry, we are bringing the tech industry to them. Their future opportunities from block chain, to data analytics to cyber security are right here.

We live in a time of expanded global commerce. We are supplying the global marketplace with our rice, soybeans, beef, and poultry. And our retail industry leaders are competing in the world of e-commerce and supply chain logistics.

We live in a time of millennials and the Z generation who value privacy and the sense of community at the same time. Arkansas wants to attract members of the new workforce, who want downtown living, kayaking, and bike trails.

And sadly, we live in a time of division. Our nation has differing views on seemingly everything. This is not historically unusual, but the shrillness of the division distracts us from getting things done. Our response in Arkansas is to lead by example. We can sort through the

differences and find the place of agreement to make a difference in life. That to me is the essence of public service and governing.

These are things we know about the present but what we don't know are the unforeseen challenges that lie ahead. I am grateful for the men and women who serve in the Arkansas National Guard who serve and protect our citizens so faithfully.

But the greatest confidence we have in the future is that the people of the United States understand freedom and how it is the bond that unites us and guides our path. We also understand the responsibility that comes with freedom. Those two together shield us as a nation and state from drifting afar from the center line of our Providential Destiny.

Thank you, and may God bless you, our nation, and the people of Arkansas.

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