

Inaugural Address OF Hon. Bryce B. Smith

Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri

APRIL 10, 1930 KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

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This address was given by Hon. Bryce B. Smith, Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, on the occasion of the Inaugural Ceremonies of the New City Administration, held April 10, 1930, in the Council Chamber of the City Hall.

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We are today assuming official control of the City Government, chosen for that task by so great a majority of the electors of Kansas City that their voice, expressed at the polls, bespeaks a confidence and a trust unparalleled in the history of our city. The responsibility now is ours, both as a party and as individuals. For the first time since the adoption of our charter, the people, doubting the wisdom of a divided government with conflicting political interests, have expressed in no uncertain tones their belief and their faith in a unified body of city officials and in the pledges and promises which we, as candidates, made to them. That faith and trust must be justified and those pledges fulfilled.

It is a great task that confronts us. There are many things to be done. The problem of governing efficiently, economically and enterprisingly such a city as Kansas City, I need not remind you, is not a simple one. We are now in the position of directors of a great corporation of more than four hundred thousand stockholders, with properties rated in billions of dollars, with millions invested in homes and industries, with streets and trafficways, parks and boulevards, public works and public adornments to be conserved and bettered, and with great financial resources to be administered to the greater good of the municipal corporation whose destinies for the next four years have been entrusted to us. We have pledged ourselves, as individuals and as a party, to a business administration and a forward looking program. It is up to us now to make good.

The first duty that calls for our calm judgment and wise selection is that of choosing the various boards and the department heads, upon whose honesty, efficiency and intelligence will depend the standards of the administrative work that will be entrusted to them. I do not believe it is necessary to remind you that these must not only be men and women in whom the people have confidence, serving, as they do, as officials of trust and of necessary initiative, but that they should be men and women of outstanding merit, adaptable to public service and imbued with the spirit expressed in that axiom of a Democratic president who gave the nation its first great business administration—"A public office is a public trust". An official who adheres to that doctrine can be relied upon to discharge the duties of his department conscientiously, intelligently, and in the interest of the people whose concern he represents.

When our various departments are organized and their personnel committed to their duties, it should be an initial aim and purpose to instill into their methods and operations the spirit of harmony, cooperation and co-ordination. There should be no factional frictions or jealousies, no bickerings over prerogatives or authority, no shifting of responsibilities, or evasions of duties. It should be made clear at the outset that every

department of the City Government and every official under its direction and control should work in complete harmony with every other department and every other official, with the aim always in view of giving the best service possible to the public.

This system of co-operation should not be confined merely to groups within the City Hall. Organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Public Service Institute, the various district improvement associations, organized for betterment of special districts, and all others of a similar civic character should be given recognition, their advice and suggestions taken into careful consideration and given due weight, remembering always that they are organizations of Kansas Citians devoted to the proper development of the city and concerned as well as ourselves with a wise and business-like administration of its affairs. The spirit of cooperation with extra-official organizations cannot be but beneficial to the best interests of the city. I should be glad to see this co-operative impulse extended to all sorts of outside organizations—art and cultural institutions, architectural and artistic experts, economical and constructive organizations devoted to special lines of improvement and development. Ours may be the official responsibility, but all the more for that reason we should avail ourselves of the advice and co-operation of all elements whose researches and study of civic problems may give us aid in any program of betterment of civic conditions and intelligent expansion.

I am glad that the spring season affords an opportunity of beginning our plans with the usual spring "house cleaning" movement. Let us encourage the citizens to beautify their homes, to put an attractive dress upon the outer garments of the city, and to inaugurate a campaign tending to make the city beautiful and sanitary. In this movement the city should co-operate by cleaning the streets and keeping them clean, removing obtrusive signs and impediments, improving the trafficway systems and preserving the highest ideals of our park and boulevard systems.

The country has been undergoing a period of depression and unemployment. It is not necessary to give the causes of these conditions undue political weight and significance. Such periods come in the ebb and flux of economic conditions. Kansas City, I am proud to say, has reacted splendidly to this wave of depression. Building operations are going on. Industrial developments have not halted. We have suffered some from the general conditions, but the vigor, the potentialities, the spirit of our progressive city has responded bravely to the most depressive waves and has refused to accept a gospel of the "blues". We are showing every evidence of hopefulness in the future, of confidence in the natural resources of our great metropolis. It should be the part of our administration not to be negatively moved by depressive conditions that may confront other cities, but to recognize to the fullest the foundations that have been laid for what promises to be the greatest era of prosperity and advancement that our city has ever witnessed. We must build upon these foundations. They are the corner-stones of a greater Kansas City and of an era of great expansion and progress. We should not shut our eyes, however, to the fact that a condition of unemployment does exist and needed public works and improvements should be rapidly projected to effect its absorption.

The handling of the Police Department has for some time been very unsatisfactory to the people of Kansas City. I want the people of Kansas City to know that as mayor I shall, as a member of our Police Board, serve actively in that position and do everything in my power to investigate conditions and remedy whatever evils may exist, although I recognize that my ability to do this may be limited to observation, suggestion and

advising them of conditions. Personally, I have always favored home rule in the Police Department. The city pays the bills. No department of the city's business, whose upkeep is paid by the city, should, as a mere business proposition, be beyond its control or regulation. It would be just as logical for the governor of the state to have custody and charge of the Fire Department, the Health Department, the Water Department, or the schools of Kansas City as it is for him to have charge and control of the Police Department. Our people should demand home rule at the next session of the Legislature. Then the entire responsibility for the administration of the Police Department would be on the executives of the Municipal Government and subject to the people's control.

In the meantime we should provide for an ample police force, thoroughly equipped and adequately paid. Regardless of the merits of the present police controversy, the city's patrolmen are not responsible therefor and should be paid. I favor ending the same on a fair and business-like basis and shall do everything I can to bring about a definite understanding between the city and the police commissioners as to budget limitations, in the hope that there will not be a recurrence of the present conditions in the Police Department. It should not be within the power of any department, participating in the city's financial budget, arbitrarily and without consultation with our fiscal agencies, to add to their salaried officials or increase their expenses to such an extent as to become an obstruction to the economical handling of the city's reserves.

This question is not one of paying or withholding pay of patrolmen. These men should be well paid and should receive their wages promptly, but their needs should not be made an excuse for extravagant budget demands by the state officials in control of the Police Department without first ascertaining the city's ability to meet such demands. I want the fullest protection given to the lives and the property of our citizens. I want every law enforced and the city purged of crime and criminals. This can only be done with the aid of a police force that is kept out of politics and left free and unhampered to perform its duties as the law-enforcing arm of the municipality. I pledge the people as chairman and ex-officio member of the Police Board to do all in my power to assist in building up the department and to attempt to divorce the department from politics, which is the only sure way of maintaining its full efficiency and integrity and in making our city not only a good place to live, but a safe place for the lives and property of our citizens, and I assure the people that so far as I am concerned the Police Department will have the same just and equitable measure of consideration as all other departments of our City Government.

Our airport has already given promise of laying the foundations for an air traffic that will be nation-wide. Aerial trafficways have been established, and passenger, freight and express lines have been laid out and defined, and others are in process of formation. To these movements we should lend hearty support and enthusiastic and intelligent method. Wharf sites have been established and money made available for development. Let us speed in every way the coming of the river traffic. Let us make these wharf sites contributory agencies for the city's development. Put the boats on the river and bring back the glories of the old river-front. We should encourage and co-operate in every way to bring about the completion of the improvement of the Missouri River to Kansas City and the establishment of boat and barge-lines, which would, I am sure, aid materially in helping agriculture and other industries in our trade territory here and in nearby cities. They will be potent agencies in bringing about reformed freight

rates which will greatly increase the trade territory into which our goods and merchandise can be shipped, and also give a much wider outlet to the agricultural products of our present territory. Our river terminals should be completed within two years, and the barge lines should be in operation not later than the spring of 1932. We will thereby open the way for restoration of river traffic and the development of a great system of water transportation, which will contribute to a greater increase in our population and the further expansion and development of industrial and manufacturing concerns and the future commercial importance of our city.

Let us inaugurate, here and now, a program of city development and improvement that will take into consideration all the districts of the city. This development should proceed harmoniously. A city developed in one direction and neglected in another is a city with lame limbs, a city of unequal growth. Under our charter system we have representatives of every district of the city, east and west, north and south. If there have been districts of the city neglected in improvements, let us give them special attention, but let no district of the city be improved at the expense of any other. Let us adopt a program that will take into consideration all the needs of the city as a whole, and let us endeavor to work that program out to the greater good of the entire city.

In any program of city planning and improvement along approved scientific lines of development, the attitude of the public service corporations, in relation to the city and to the tax paying public, is one of paramount importance. While under our laws the regulation of these corporations is largely vested in a commission created and operated by the state government, it must not be forgotten that these companies have contractual relations with the municipality and are operated under basic franchises granted by the city. City expansion necessarily must have contributory expansion and extended service upon their part to meet the wants of the growing city. While we should deprecate any tendency to hamper, harass or antagonize a proper regard for the security of the investments of such corporations, the rights of the city and its citizens should be rigidly insisted upon. Extension of lights into new districts, power and heating facilities and necessary means of transportation should follow new sectional development. Complaints as to inadequate service should be taken up and investigated by the proper city officials. Every public service corporation, operating under a city franchise, should be made to conform to the letter and the spirit of its contract.

In the matter of public transportation, the Public Service Corporation now practically enjoys a monopoly, since its recent acquisition of the taxicab companies. It has largely reduced its overhead expenses by the installation of one-man cars and by the curtailing of service cars during the non-rush hours. But this economical system should not be permitted to encroach upon the rights of the people to a full and comfortable service during the rush hours when adequate service is most needed and which the company is bound, under its franchise, to furnish. Twenty to twenty-five minute service at any hour of the day on the main city trunk lines is not adequate service. It tends to produce unsanitary conditions by overcrowding and by keeping people waiting during severe weather on the street corners. The company is obligated to furnish sufficient cars to accommodate the people, especially during the morning hours from 6 o'clock until 9 o'clock and during the evening hours between 5 o'clock and 8 o'clock. The street car company should be compelled to furnish an ample supply of cars to carry the people to and from their work, without uncomfortable crowding of the cars and without long waits between cars.

The question of an increased fare is one in which all the people of the city have an economic personal interest. The city, through its Legal Department, is now doing all in its power to protect the interests of the people and they may rest assured that the present administration will do everything legally possible to prevent the demanded increase of fares from going into effect, in the firm belief that the present charges are amply sufficient and greater, in fact, than those in force in most cities of the size and importance of Kansas City.

The prospects are that the Nelson Gallery of Art and the Atkins Museum should be started within the next two or three months, costing approximately three million dollars, and should be completed in two or three years. The city already owns twenty acres, the former site of Oak Hall, and it is hoped that certain ground across and south of Brush Creek may be obtained when necessary, thereby completing and adding to the present site about thirty acres of land. It is the plan and intention that around and upon these grounds may be ultimately placed a cultural group of buildings such as a Natural History Museum, Historical Building, Music Hall, and others of like type and description. The trustees of the William R. Nelson Fund have a prospective income from about eleven million dollars to spend for the purchase of objects of art, and now have about two million dollars accumulated in this fund with which soon to begin the purchase thereof for exhibition in these new galleries. These great art foundations inure to the benefit of every citizen of Kansas City. They are in no sense sectional improvements. Like Swope Park, the people's great pleasure ground, these art centers will contribute to the pleasure of all our citizens today and to future generations.

Let us cherish the belief in this connection that this is only a beginning and that the city will from time to time receive a great many more bequests and gifts of this nature and that it will be recognized and established as one of the great cultural centers of the United States. The gift of Howard Vanderslice of the old A. R. Meyer home of nine acres amounts to \$140,000.00 His additional gift of \$200,000.00 and Mrs. Epperson's gift of \$100,000.00 is making the Art Institute one of the strongest Art Schools in the country, with some six hundred students enrolled, one-third of them from outside of Kansas City. This makes the Art Institute a very valuable neighbor for the Nelson Gallery of Art and other cultural institutions. I believe that the Blue Valley is opening up wonderful opportunities for development, and the contemplated beautiful parkways and trafficways should be so laid out and constructed as to prevent the pollution and preserve the beauty of the stream and still not restrict the great and growing industrial development in that section. To my mind there appears to be no good reason why this improvement should not be carried clear through from the North Bottoms to Swope Park and connected with the highways on the south being built by Jackson County.

The Winner Road Viaduct should be a very important factor for handling traffic from the east in and out of Kansas City, and I believe it feasible for a system of better trafficways to be worked out all around the north part of Kansas City, serving the future Northeast industrial district. The whole trafficway problem of Kansas City is one of immense importance, and delay is extremely expensive, because many improvements are being erected which will later have to be torn down to provide trafficways of sufficient width. With the present-day needs of automobile and truck traffic, all cities are finding it necessary to provide good trafficways on easy grades for properly handling industrial and commercial traffic both within and without the city. Anything that we can do to reduce the cost of transacting business in Kansas City puts our city and our

people in a better position to compete for supremacy in trading with many other prominent and important cities in the Middle West now competing or attempting to compete with us. Our park and boulevard system needs considerable further improvement to make it keep pace with the rapid development of many other cities in this particular. We have acquired a large amount of land, but most of our park areas have not been properly improved. We should plan for continuous park improvements and make the plans effective from year to year.

Every city is finding it important to study its street system, trafficways and boulevards in connection with the highways beyond the city limits in all directions. The present Regional Planning Association, under Judge Harry S. Truman as chairman, has been making exhaustive study and getting considerable cooperation from the authorities in all surrounding counties. I believe that this cooperation should be encouraged in every way by our city administration, and that it is good business to have a very careful study made of those matters so as to establish the best possible relationship in all traffic matters common to both the surrounding counties and Kansas City. We have been slow in this movement. Practically every other large city in the country has been tackling the problem for many years. New York has made a study extending 50 miles beyond the city limits, Chicago, 25 miles, Philadelphia 25 miles, and St. Louis has been making a similar survey. Los Angeles has made a very exhaustive research not only of the needs of the community itself, but one of the tributary territory surrounding it. I believe this to be of vital importance to the future progress of our city, and it is something in which I believe our administration can be of great help in encouraging enthusiasm and interest among all the various public authorities in the cities, towns and counties that contribute to our composite community, which, after all, is just one big unit when it is considered as competing with the United States at large in the building of a large city.

Many of our citizens believe that if our city is to continue to grow and develop normally and substantially that we should have a Convention Hall of sufficient capacity and facilities to house the great conventions that would logically come to our city but which have gone elsewhere because of our failure to have proper modern facilities conveniently to take care of the same; that we should also have a great stadium and fine outdoor theatre. The experience of other cities has proved that wherever a municipal outdoor theatre has been built, it has been of great advantage to their city. In my opinion, we should do everything possible to make our city alluring and attractive to people from out of town, so that they will be eager and glad to visit our city, to buy our goods and merchandise, and to encourage others to trade with us. If we can make the city properly attractive from every point of view, of utility, industrially, culturally and beautifully, there is no question in my mind but what these visitors and travelers will be attracted to remain in our city, to see and enjoy the many things of interest and to carry our fame abroad. Kansas City, instead of being a one-day town, will thus soon be recognized throughout our whole trade territory as one of the great metropolises of the country, where people are drawn for the purpose of obtaining the most modern and latest ideas in the development of all things combining to make a city a recognized center of industry, culture, homes and art.

I am in favor of a ten-year plan of city improvement, not merely for the special lines of improvement set out, but more especially for the reason that it affords a definite program and a time limit. Ten years in the growth of a city is not much. It is but a brief time in which to make comprehensive developments. But it gives an impetus, and a

goal toward which to work. At the end of one ten-year period we may attach another, but each decade will witness something achieved, some aim set and attained. This ten-year program and plan should be carefully considered, but not in a doubting spirit. If we plan things year by year, we will accomplish things year by year. There is nothing to be gained by eternal theory and argument. The only way to better the city, to improve conditions, is to map out a program and follow it. We may make some mistakes, but we will accomplish something and not waste our time and the people's money in windy speculations. Let us go ahead with a program.

In this ten-year program let us take the advice of organizations that have given the subject some thought. Let us take up their plans and ideas and give them impartial consideration. And let us save the good and put it into effect and discard the impractical. But I am a firm believer in the efficacy of plan and method and a time limit of accomplishment. The question of funds and the sources of funds will be one to which we must give careful thought and investigation. The city must be kept within its revenues. We have pledged an economical administration of the city affairs, and that pledge must be redeemed. If bond issues are necessary, let us not stand back. It is a false economy that hesitates to contract debt when such debt means an expansion and a foundation of progress which could not otherwise be accomplished. We are building for posterity as well as ourselves. The city we are improving and extending will be here a long time, for the enjoyment of those that follow us, for our children and our heirs. Our wisdom will be their profit.

I do not believe that the time has yet come for definite financial plans or methods. The city's financial conditions should be expertly studied. Its potentialities should be considered. How far we may incur debt, with advantage to ourselves and to the good of our city are matters for our serious preliminary consideration. I can only now say to you that we, as the servants of the people and as individual citizens of Kansas City, have been honored with a trust and ushered into office with an expectation of great performance, of honest and efficient conduct of City Government, of a progressive and enterprising executive management of this great municipal corporation entrusted to our charge, and we must not fail of our duty in any respect, nor fail to respond in every way to the expectations of the people or to the confidence which they so implicitly expressed in the recent election. Let us approach our official duties with a high appreciation of that trust and confidence and with the purpose of redeeming every pledge towards a good business administration of affairs that we have made to the citizens of Kansas City.