

1965 INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF MAYOR ROBERT L. COUTURIER

My Friends and Fellow-Citizens,

First, I want to thank Governor Reed for honoring the City of Lewiston by his presence here tonight. We appreciate the fact that the Chief Executive of our State thinks highly enough of our City to attend the inauguration of it's municipal officers.

In 1939, following a scandal of considerable importance, a group of citizens decided that Lewiston needed reforms and a new City Charter. They set themselves to work and combined different forms of government to give Lewiston it's so-called "New Charter", a mayor-council-commission form of government, unique at its inception and destined to remain the only one of its kind in the country, if not in the world.

No one questions the need for the reforms of 1939. But if, at times, power corrupts, it does not do so all of the time. One must always remember that government is only as good as the people who take an active part in it; it is honest only if the officials are honest, it is wise only if the officials are wise. If a pie cannot be any larger than the sum of it's pieces, a governmental body cannot be any better than are the people who form it.

Checks and balances may be effective to a certain extent at keeping government honest, but nothing will prevent a corrupt or unscrupulous official from finding loopholes through which he will be able to accomplish what he desires.

Excessive checks on the power of any official will only slow down the wheels of government -- it will accomplish little else. It might even bring those wheels to a standstill creating a situation where progress is no longer possible or feasible.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Charter under which the City of Lewiston functions today is not the same "New Charter of 1939." It is indeed a new charter written by interpretations of the various city counsels through the years.

Where power was formerly balanced, it has been funnelled--due to loopholes-- into the hands of one single appointed body: the Board of Finance. And while the mayor may be dependent on the people, the Board of Finance is neither responsible to the electorate nor the mayor. The members of the Board of Finance are responsible only to their own conscience and to God. This same Board has consolidated it's power and has given Lewiston, through an interpretation of our charter, a virtual City Manager form of Government, making the office of the Controller that of Chief Executive Officer for the entire city.

The balance of power found in the "New Charter of 1939" has been destroyed. The elected officials of our city have little control over the purse strings of Lewiston. We have abandoned the original intention of the 1939 Charter to balance and check power in order to adopt a virtual dictatorial form of government.

Lewiston and it's citizens can no longer afford to support this "one-of-its-kind" form of government. We must return to the American Way of Life. Our City Charter has already been changed by interpretation. It is now time that we change both the Charter and the interpretations legally and with the approval of the people.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties have "home-rule" planks in their platforms. Home rule would give our people a chance to decide which form of government they want. I am asking Androscoggin County Senators and Lewiston's Representatives at the Legislature to lend an active hand at making "home rule" a reality. Once "home rule" is accepted, Lewiston people will be able to decide for themselves exactly under which form of government they want to live.

I am convinced that you, the people, want "taxation with elected representation" to come to an end. I am sure that you have no desire to elect men who will, of necessity, be mere figure-heads. I know that come the day of decision, you will gladly rid our city of it's octopus and replace it with a free, modern, dem-

ocratic form of government where the people not only pay the taxes, but through their ELECTED representatives, decide what government shall accomplish. In the near future, I will name an official committee to look into this matter. For the moment, efforts will be concentrated on obtaining "home-rule". I encourage you to make your ideas and feelings on this matter known to your elected representatives in the State Senate and House. I believe that you agree with me when I say that "taxation without proper elected representation is nothing less than tyranny."

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

We have our charter, and we have to live with it as it is. Each of the major Boards and Commissions has five members. It is intended for those five members to work and come to decisions together. It is most unfortunate that certain board members are too busy to attend meetings of their respective bodies. The fact that they accept the honor without doing the work involved is not in the best interest of the City. The burdens of office necessarily come to rest on the shoulders of their confreres on the boards. Lack of participation as well as lack of interest and long absence from the city by board members are inconsistent with the best interest of Lewiston. Supervision is one of the duties of board members and they must be present to be able to supervise. I plan to keep a watchful eye on those who are consistently absent from meetings, for I feel that any member who is too busy to do his duty or who leaves for a prolonged period of time should resign and leave the obligations of public office to those citizens who can and are willing to make sacrifices to devote the required time to civic responsibility.

Generally speaking, Lewiston's taxpayers are not rich people. They are conscientious and ready to carry the burden of government. I have been informed that, as I take office tonight, the tax rate is in the vicinity of 59 mills. This figure represents an increase of approximately 11 mills in the tax rate and

does not take revaluation into account. It is my belief that this increase is unreasonable at the present time. I request that the Board of Finance and the appropriate Boards and Commissions cut non-mandatory expenses to bring the tax rate within reason. If it is necessary to tighten our belts, then we will simply have to tighten our belts. There is a cost to progress; and, we must be willing to pay it, but that cost must be reasonable. Programs which should have top priority are those where this City can obtain help from the Federal Government and/or State government. I am inheriting a tax rate of 59 mills and the citizens will have to accept that fact, for there is little that I can do about it.

During the campaign, I spoke of the need for adequate transportation in our area. A committee will be appointed shortly to look into that matter. The committee will be under the chairmanship of Mr. James B. Longley. I look forward to much progress in improving transportation.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

If our city is to grow and prosper, it is necessarily mandatory that we continue our search for new industries. However, that is not to say that we should abandon the industries that have already placed their confidence in our area. Indeed, those industries already located here should be encouraged to prosper and to grow, for in them we have a priceless potential for the future.

In past years, the Industrial Development Director of the City of Lewiston has become the focus of interest and criticism. While the decision to appoint or not appoint him for another year is entirely that of the Board of Finance, I would like to express a few thoughts. We have been training the present Director for the past eight (8) years. The City has reportedly spent in the vicinity of \$250,000. Public opinion is divided. I have heard executives and people in the industrial development field praise him; I have listened to citizens tear him to shreds. Even if one does not think that Mr. Michael was ideally

suites for the position when he was appointed eight years ago, the fact remains that we have spent a considerable sum of money in training him; we have paid for contacts which could pay off anytime. Before we talk of his departure, let us ask ourselves, fellow-citizens, whether the City of Lewiston can afford to spend another eight years to train a man who might then leave when opportunity knocks. I say that we must think twice before we make that decision. If the present Director is reappointed or if another man is hired, we should all work together so that our Industrial Director will not become the focus of bickering and fighting. Whoever he is, let the man do his job in peace. Do not waste the taxpayer's money by forcing the Industrial Director to sit at his desk all day, defending himself against often unjustified attacks. Let us see to it rather that he be given peace of mind and a free hand to go out and do the job for which he was hired: industrial development.

In the competition for new industries, if we are to have appeal as a city, we must put our best foot forward. We must project the real image of Lewiston. Lewiston is hard-working people; Lewiston is courage; Lewiston is good employer-employee relations; Lewiston is faith in the future.

Noisy council meetings broadcast to outlying communities and press stories bordering on the sensational do not really represent Lewiston and its spirit. They do not really give the impression that Lewiston is a good place to live, to work and to play.

If we are to convey a good impression, the people will have to develop more interest and take a more active part in our government. For, the final responsibility for the caliber of our government rests with the people, and with the people alone. I intend to do my best to help develop this interest on the part of our citizenry and will use all means available to bring City Hall, the issues and the decisions to those who have the most at stake: YOU, the people. It is for you, and for your welfare, that we must all be willing to work together and

to sacrifice together. We must labor today to assure, for our city, a brighter tomorrow.

I have asked the people I will appoint in a few seconds to be courageous and strong in their determination to give our city the best administration possible. I know them to be good, honest citizens with ability and integrity. I am sure that they will serve our city well and to the satisfaction of all good-willed citizens.

*Mayor Robert L. Couturier
Lewiston, Maine
January 4, 1965*

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