ADDRESS

To the People of Pennsylvania

The undersigned, your Senators and representatives, being about to separate after the discharge of arduous duty, deem it to be their duty to present a view of the public affairs of the Commonwealth with reference to their past and present administration, and the hopes which several classes of citizens have a right to entertain of a change for the future.—During the session of the Legislature which has just terminated, they have labored with a resolute purpose and meeting the expectations of the people and the responsibilities imposed upon them by a state of things unparalleled in the history of our country. As the expression of the wants of the people manifested, in petitions for relief in a season of unequalled distress were presented to them, they sought to meet these wishes, and by one measure of relief after another, such as have passed both Houses to do for the people what the people had a right to ask.

Unhappily for those who sought relief, and for the legislature who proceeded to afford it, the Executive authority has been conferred upon an individual, who, exercising it with no view but for the maintenance of his own official influence, has been induced to adopt no settled measure of either relief or reform, or been willing to unite with us in ours. There is a course of official duty which the Constitution contemplates as the part of the Executive alike removed from the improper interference and mysterious reserve, which, had it been pursued by the present executive, would have been well and our session, simplified our labors and enabled us to return home with the happy assurance that the Government, by the concurrent action of its various departments, relieved the distress and perplexity of its constituency. That course is the same which the patriot Harrison intended to pursue, to which his successor pledged, and in its spirit having made these recommendations to acquiesce in the action of the immediate Representatives of the people unless it violates either the Constitution or some essential principle of good government.

This middle course between obstrusive interference and stubborn reserve, the present Executive of Pennsylvania seems unable to discern, and the Legislature has been compelled with the utmost reluctance, after the honest effort to do duty always affords, to wait for weeks and months unable to attain a glimpse of Executive opinions except when they were made manifest in forms frequently couched in disrespectful language, or as they could be gathered from the intimations of accredited partizans in and out of the Legislature. Under such embarrassment has the Legislature acted, and to such embarrassment has the Executive been content to leave us to act. We wish a suffering people to understand this and to listen to the proof.

The session of the Legislature commenced on the first Tuesday of January 1841. The state of things throughout the Commonwealth was then most peculiar. The Banks were in a state of general suspension. The currency consisted mainly of the notes of the Banks of other states and of the Bank of the United States, and for the settlement of the small accounts which form so large a proportion of the daily business of the community, paper was accessible but the illegal and discredited small note currency from abroad. A promised resumption of specie payments was at hand and every good citizen looked forward with the hope, if not the expectation that it might be permanent and the community might not soon again be called to witness a scene of universal distress. There were many who believed that no permanent resumption could be effected without the beneficial interposition of the General Government, and on that interposition affected by the measures and patriotism of a President chosen by Pennsylvania itself, we confidently relied. But the Governor was not one of these.—He relied on the efficacy of state legislation directed by mere party impulses; he shared in none of our expectations of action at Washington; he never expressed and probably never felt any share of the confidence which the reason and good feeling of the people reposed in the wisdom and patriotism of the lamented Harrison. Now we ask you to mark the results. On the 15th of January 1841, the Banks resumed specie payments—on the first of February the Governor negotiated a loan of nearly 600,000 dollars with the Banks and mainly with the Bank of the United States—on the 4th of February the Banks again suspended and in a state of almost hopeless prostration have they remained ever since.

On the 8th day of February the intelligence of the calamity reached the seat of Government through private channels.—The Legislature after pausing to give the Executive an opportunity of presenting his views at this crisis, proceeded without further delay to do its duty and legislate for the crying necessities of the people.—To enable the Executive to suggest his remedy for the evils then impending was due alike to him and to ourselves—we waited but we waited in vain. The executive functions were paralyzed. No word fell from the lips of the Governor, and so far as we or the public are apprised of his views as voluntarily expressed, content with the present state of things, irredeemable currency, hopelessly irredeemable for the suffering people, he wrapped himself in mysterious silence and made no effort, gave no sign that promised relief.

Not so your Representatives—unaided, unconsulted by the Executive, they assumed the responsibility and measures of relief were originated, matured and enacted. Mixed however with the prayer for relief, there was an emphatic demand for reform—and it was with a steady view to the coincident administration of relief and reform that our measures were prepared.

It was not long before a measure of bank reform and popular relief was enacted by both Houses. It was rigid in its enactments to the Banks. It was generous and beneficient for the people. It limited the powers of Bank officers and directors—it wholesomely restricted Banking operations. It was not the extravagant privilege of disregarding law. It was the privilege which necessity exacted and it was nothing more. But with that privilege were connected vital measures of reform which the people had long demanded. So far as the legislature was concerned their duty was promptly and faithfully performed.

Now was it till the Legislature had thus acted that any Executive intimation was made. It came as usual in the form of a peremptory refusal to acquiesce in the views of the Representatives of the people, and it left the Legislature to mature its measures again, and guessing at the varying opinions of the executive to try to conceive how which might conform to them and at the same time be consonant with public policy and Constitutional requisition.

With what an anxious desire to regulate our course by wise and disinterested views—to do what a peculiar exigency required and no more—to conciliate our political adversaries and secure to them the credit or persuade them to unite with us in a common effort to relieve the suffering community, those who were immediate spectators of the scene best can tell. We can but be deemed representing the feelings of usall on the floor of the Senate expressly tendered to the friends of the Executive the assurance of an earnest desire to bury party feelings, and co operate cordially in measures at which no party cavil could be uttered. But it was in vain. The only answer was derision at the effort, and a scornful denial of the existence of all distress among our constituents.

Not discouraged by the failure of all these efforts, the undersigned again entered a measure of relief designed to effect the great object in the attainment of which we believe the hopes of our suffering constituents were involved. Would our constituents have seen what we have seen, and known what we have known, they would still more highly appreciate our reasonable anxiety to give relief. Not only was the community generally agonized, but certain classes the pressure of the times fell with peculiar severity. The contracts on the unfinished lines of the public works were made to the Commonwealth, faithfully, telmnly and sacredly pledged by agents who, however faithless to their trusts, were still the agents of the State. The Canal Commissioners holding their offices at the will of the Governor, aware that to appropriations were expended or contracted beyond the public works. Of this action we do not feel disposed to speak further than to say that the Executive who would thus willingly incur debts ought to be willing to pay them and not to deny poor justice to those who suffer by his acts. The contractors who in full confidence trusted the Commonwealth, have come to feel the injustice of this part of the Executive conduct