

# George Hartshorn Hodges

**THE STATE OF KANSAS,  
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE.  
TOPEKA, March 10, 1913.**

To the Legislature of the State of Kansas:

AS the legislative duties of the Legislature of 1913 draw to a close, I desire to congratulate the members of both branches on the magnificent work which they have accomplished. I believe that I am justified in saying that you have worked harder and accomplished more than any Legislature in recent years. Almost every pledge you made to the people last year has been fulfilled.

But I am convinced that this magnificent record is due rather to the efficient membership of this Legislature than to the system.

In common with a large and growing number of thoughtful people, I am persuaded that the instrumentalities for legislation provided for in our state constitution have become antiquated and inefficient. Our system is fashioned after the English parliament, with its two houses based upon the distinction between the nobility and the common people, each House representing the divers interests of these classes. No reason exists in this state for a dual legislative system, and even in England at the present time the dual system has been practically abandoned and the upper House shorn of its importance, and I believe that we should now concern ourselves in devising a system for legislating that will give us more efficiency and quicker response to the demands of our economic and social conditions and to the will of the people.

I have been led to this conclusion by an experience of eight years as a member of the Senate of this state and my convictions on this subject are by no means of recent date. As far back as March 12, 1911, in an interview printed in one of the great dailies, I advocated that our present legislative system be abandoned and that a Legislative Assembly of thirty members from thirty legislative districts, under the check of the recall, be provided for in its place. The suggestions made at that time met with much favorable comment, and I firmly believe that there is a growing public opinion in its favor.

You senators and representatives cannot but have observed the defects of our present system. In a short session of fifty days you are required to study and pass upon hundreds of measures, and the hurry with which this must be done must of necessity result in a number of more or less crude and ill-digested laws, which often puzzle learned jurists to interpret with anything like satisfaction to themselves or to the public. Hundreds of measures also, embodying important legislation, die on the calendar every two years. After a brief session, the Legislature adjourns and the business of one coordinate branch of the state government is absolutely abandoned for a whole biennium, unless the Legislature is convoked in an expensive extraordinary session by the governor. It is as if the head of an important department of some other "big business" should give only fifty days every two years to its management.

I am aware of the veneration with which ancient institutions are regarded in some quarters, but I see no reason why we should cling to these institutions in carrying on the all-important affairs of the state, when in almost every other activity of life we are discarding old traditions and antiquated methods for newer and progressive ideas and more efficient and economic methods. This Legislature has itself discarded the antiquated and inefficient methods of managing the business of our big state institutions and has concentrated the responsibility in the hands of a few instead of many boards—in a word, has applied to them the principle of government by commission. We have recognized in this state also that the old methods of city government are expensive, inefficient and unsatisfactory, and everywhere the commission plan of city government is being adopted, and in almost every case is yielding high-class results.

For myself, I can see no good reason why this new idea of government by commission should not be adopted for the transaction of the business of the state. Two years ago I suggested a single legislative assembly of thirty members from thirty legislative districts. I am now inclined to believe that this number is too large, and that a legislative assembly of one, or at most two, from each congressional district would be amply large. My judgement is that the governor should be ex officio a member and presiding officer of this assembly, and that it should be permitted to meet in such frequent and regular or adjourned sessions as the exigencies of the public business may demand; that their terms or office be for four or six years, and that they be paid salaries sufficient to justify them in devoting their entire time to the public business. Such a legislative assembly would not, I believe, be more expensive than our present system. It would centralize responsibility and accountability, and under the check of the recall would be quickly responsive to the wishes of the people.

A legislative assembly such as I have suggested could give ample time to the consideration of every measure, not only in relation to its subject matter, but to the drafting of it in plain, concise and easily understandable language. It would be ready at any time to deal with new conditions and to provide relief in emergency cases, and, with time to inform itself about conditions, and to study the needs of the people, and of our state institutions, there seems to me to be no question but what it would be vastly more efficient than our present system, as well as vastly more economical.

Our present system has been in vogue since Kansas became a state, more than fifty years ago, and in that time we have seen the most remarkable changes in sociological and economic conditions take place. No private business now uses the methods of fifty years ago. In every activity of modern life new and progressive methods have been adopted. By "progressive" I do not mean any visionary scheme of government, but the exercise of that sane, sober and wise judgment which is always ready to throw away antiquated machinery and methods and adopt the latest, most efficient, most beneficent and most economical instrumentalities for accomplishing the greatest good, whether it be in public or in private affairs.

Is there any good reason why political institutions should not change with the changing demands of modern social and economic conditions? I believe not. The leaven of this new idea of modern business methods for modern public business has taken root in the public mind. The people are everywhere talking it over, and I am one of those who believe that the people can be trusted to reach correct conclusions about their own public business when they are given adequate

opportunity to study and discuss any subject. As Wendell Phillips said, "The people always mean right, and in the end they will have it right." The people of Kansas are progressive; they knew what they want; and give them a chance at the ballot box and they will get it. I am not in sympathy with the idea that any public officer knows better than the people themselves what they want.

I am not asking at this time that any legislative action be taken on this subject, but am calling your attention to this subject now that you may carry back to your people the idea herein expressed and talk it over with them for the next two years, to the end that when you come back to these halls at that time you may know and be of a mind to execute the will of the people of this state on this subject.

I want to thank the members of the Legislature of 1913 for their sincere and earnest efforts to legislate for the best interests of the state, and for the uniform courtesy which they have extended to me, and to assure them of the high personal regard in which I hold each and every senator and representative.

**Respectfully submitted.**  
**GEO. H. HODGES, Governor.**

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