

**Governor John Letcher's Message to the General Assembly, January 7, 1861**

Unless a settlement of the controversy shall be speedily effected, every species of property must fall to merely nominal prices, and a scene of general and ruinous bankruptcy, far exceeding, in extent and severity, any that has preceeded it, must be the inevitable result. Even now, hundreds and thousands have been thrown out of employment, and at this inclement season poverty, want and misery must be the portion of them and their dependent families. It is time the conservative spirit of the country was aroused and stimulated to energetic action. No time is to be lost in putting into immediate requisition all fair, honorable and constitutional means that promise to secure a satisfactory and permanent adjustment.

What, then, is necessary to be done? The northern states must strike from their statute books their personal liberty bills, and fulfill their constitutional obligations in regard to fugitive slaves and fugitives from justice. If our slaves escape into non-slaveholding states, they must be delivered up; if abandoned, depraved and desperately wicked men come into slave states to excite insurrections, or to commit other crimes against our laws, and escape into free states, they must be given up for trial and punishment, when lawfully demanded by the constituted authorities of those states whose laws have been violated.

*Second*— We must have proper and effective guarantees for the protection of slavery in the district of Columbia. We can never consent to the abolition of slavery in the district, until Maryland shall emancipate her slaves; and not then, unless it shall be demanded by the citizens of the district.

*Third*— Our equality in the states and territories must be fully recognized, and our rights of person and property adequately protected and secured. We must have guarantees that slavery shall not be interdicted in any territory now belonging to, or which may hereafter be acquired by the general government; either by the congress of the United States or a territorial legislature: that we shall be permitted to pass through the free states and territories without molestation; and if a slave shall be abducted, that the state in which he or she shall be lost, shall pay the full value of such slave to the owner.

*Fourth*— Like guarantees must be given, that the transmission of slaves between the slaveholding states, either by land or water, shall not be interfered with.



## Transcription

*Fifth*— The passage and enforcement of rigid laws for the punishment of such persons in the free states as shall organize, or aid and abet in organizing, either by the contribution of money, arms, munitions of war, or in any other mode whatsoever, companies of men, with a view to assail the slaveholding states, and to excite slaves to insurrection.

*Sixth*— That the general government shall be deprived of the power of appointing to local offices in the slaveholding states, persons who are hostile to their institutions, or inimical to their rights—the object being to prevent the appointing power from using patronage to sow the seeds of strife and dissension between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding classes in the southern states.

These guarantees can be given without prejudice to the honor or rights, and without a sacrifice of the interests, of either of the non-slaveholding states. We ask nothing, therefore, which is not clearly right, and necessary to our protection: And surely, when so much is at stake, it will be freely, cheerfully and promptly assented to. It is the interest of the north and the south to preserve the government from destruction; and they should omit the use of no proper or honorable means to avert so great a calamity. The public safety and welfare demand instant action.

Many of the fanatics in the northern states are constantly calling attention to the fact, that the number of slave owners, as compared with the white population in the slave states, is small; and hence the inference that the non-slaveholder is not loyal to the state, and would not willingly defend the institution. This is a most serious mistake, and is well calculated to make an erroneous impression upon the northern mind. Such a representation does serious injustice to that loyal and patriotic class of our citizens. It is a reflection upon them, not warranted by their conduct, now or heretofore.

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**Citation:** Extract from Governor John Letcher to the Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Delegates, January 7, 1861, printed as Document No. 1 in the *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Extra Session, 1861* (Richmond, 1861), xx–xxii.