
**Address to People of Wisconsin
Nomination as HHS Secretary
Gov. Tommy G. Thompson
Governor's Conference Room
December 29, 2000**

Good evening.

I've known this day would come, but it was always in a distant dream....a thought in the back of my mind that I could always put off for another day.

Well, tomorrow is finally here. And just like many of my friends and neighbors in this great state, I have confronted what's next in my future and made a decision about what I plan to do next in my career.

As many of you know, President-elect George W. Bush introduced me earlier today as his nominee for secretary of Health and Human Services.

Therefore, should I be confirmed, I intend to leave my job as Governor of Wisconsin.

And make no mistake: Those were just the 15 hardest words I've ever spoken.

There has been no greater honor in my life – and will be no greater honor – than to have been elected four times to serve as your governor. And there's no harder decision I will ever make than the one to move on.

I wanted to tell you, the people of Wisconsin, of my decision first, but I hope you understand that protocol dictated the president-elect make the official announcement, and that required me to be in Washington this morning.

I know many have wondered what's been going through my mind the last few weeks. And there are many who have not been shy about expressing my thoughts on my behalf. After reading all the anonymous sources in the newspapers the past few weeks, I never realized I had so many close friends and advisers.

But despite false reports that I was holding out for a different job or negotiating for this or that, the conversations between George Bush, Dick Cheney and myself were always very positive and productive. The president really wanted me to do this job, and I knew this was the agency where I could really have the greatest impact helping this administration succeed. Think about it: these are the issues we've been working on passionately for 14 years here in Wisconsin. So, I am very humbled and honored to be asked to do this job.

The struggle was an internal one. I love Wisconsin. How do I leave?

My mind was taking me to Washington, but my heartstrings kept pulling me back to Wisconsin.

I've spent 35 years in public service here. I've spent 14 of the greatest years of my life as Governor.

Wisconsin is the only place I've ever lived; the place where I met and married my wife and where my children were born and grew up. It's the only place I'll ever call home.

Speaking of my family, I owe them so much for the sacrifices they have made for me. My wife, Sue Ann, and my three children have been a bedrock of strength and support. And once again, they are there for me now. Sue Ann, Kelli, Tommi and Jason encouraged me to take on this challenge, even though they know it means going to Washington. (Of course, I'm sure Sue Ann is thrilled I would be in charge of overseeing women's health issues and funding in this country.) But there is no way I would be in this position today if it weren't for my family. Thank you.

And then there are the people of this state – you're all family. That's the most special part of being governor, you're family grows by 5 million people. And as family, my love and respect for all of you is unwavering.

But even in the closest of families, we find a time when we must move on. We need to go forward. So for me, the decision came to this:

The president called. My duty is to serve. And so, I must go.

As you know, I greatly admire George W. Bush and I am excited about his agenda for America. I would never leave Wisconsin if I didn't feel so passionately about this administration and what it seeks to accomplish.

When you step back and look at it, the Bush administration wants to take the Wisconsin Way to solving the problems facing America. George W. Bush is going to bring old-fashioned common sense to the White House, and develop pragmatic programs to address the challenges facing Americans.

Most importantly, he's going to reach out and bring this nation together. We've accomplished so much in Wisconsin by reaching across the partisan divide to work for the best interest of our state. George W. Bush did the same in Texas and he wants to bring that approach to Washington. He knows our great nation can do remarkable things when we erase divisions and work together. Our country is thirsting for this type of leadership.

Source: Marquette University Libraries; Tommy G. Thompson Collection; Series 2: Gubernatorial Speeches.

So I'm enthusiastic about what we can do together to make America a better place for our children and families.

But I go with a heavy heart for my friends and neighbors here in Wisconsin – the extended family whom I love so very much.

We have accomplished so much together in Wisconsin. We've overcome so many obstacles and bucked the odds time and time again. Every time they said it couldn't be done, we proved them wrong.

We've ushered in and nurtured the longest, most sustained era of success in Wisconsin history. Name the issue and Wisconsin is better off today.

It's a legacy for future generations we can all take great pride in accomplishing. And it's a legacy we all can rightfully claim credit, for we built it by working together.

We believe in ourselves again. We believe we can do anything. And we believe our future holds no bounds.

For in America, Wisconsin is where the future begins. And today certainly marks a new beginning for myself, my family and our state.

Thank you for all your prayers, support and friendship throughout the years. I love you all.

God bless you and our great state.