
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Present - V

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It is with more than pleasure that I welcome you to Washington: it is with a full sense of the importance to the Nation of this gathering of thoughtful men representing every section of the country and every walk in life. For the Navy League is, I take it, an organization which seeks to take up the broadest kind of questions in the broadest kind of way. If any man has an idea that you gentlemen are gathered here with the sole purpose of giving us a Navy which will be bigger than all the other navies of the Earth put together, he has but to look at the topics on the program for discussion to find out that you are interested in the great matters of peaceful commerce and international comity which engage the attention of every thinking American.

Of course you will realize that the Secretary of the Navy and I have had our hand at the helm of the Department for a very brief time, but let me assure you that we have always known at least that a ship is hollow, and that we are striving not only to learn our task, but to help do our utmost to secure for our ships and for our officers and men the highest degree of efficiency.

And to obtain this, we need help. No organization, either private or public, can ever reach a high degree of perfection alone. There must be cooperation from the outside. A railroad cannot succeed if every passenger is dissatisfied. A manufacturing plant cannot go on unless it has the moral

support of the neighboring townspeople. And so the Navy cannot be truly successful unless the men who run it, from the Secretary down to the newest enlisted man, feel that the people of the country are thinking about them and giving them support.

This is not a question of war or peace. I take it that there are as many advocates of arbitration and international peace in the Navy as in any other profession. But we are confronted with a condition - the fact that our Nation has decided in the past to have a fleet, and that war still is a possibility.

That the Navy is to-day an important factor in the life of the country is shown by the cold figures of 51,500 enlisted men, 3076 officers, and many thousands of civil employees in the yards and bureaus. In other words, this force is an important factor in our industrial and social life. ~~It~~^{is} is going to be made a factor for the national good.[?] That is what the Department is trying to do and that is what the Navy League can help us do. We want the country to feel that in maintaining a fighting force of the highest efficiency, we are, at the same time, educating thousands of young men to be better citizens and to be in a position to help themselves when they leave the service. We want to give them industrial educations under ideal conditions. Most of all, we will help to create a mercantile marine owned by us and run by us.

The country as a whole is, I believe, interested in the Navy. You gentlemen can cooperate by telling the truth about the Navy to every man, woman and child who is willing to listen, and I am a firm believer that when this is done, the people will express themselves through their representatives in the Government in terms which will not be misunderstood.

I know that this meeting will be of real service, and I trust it will be the forerunner of greater knowledge, straighter thinking and better citizenship throughout the nation.

