
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Washington - "Suburban Development"

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"Suburban Development", Washington, D.C.

-- 0025

FDR Speech File

ADDRESS OF
HON. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.
"SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT"

President Callahan: In this hour of great progressive-ness and achievement, many young men have come to the front. The achievements of the distinguished guest are well known possibly to most of you. When a young man, a few years ago, he emnounced himself as a candidate for the position of State Senator in his district in New York, ~~and~~ this was looked upon as a joke, because for twenty-eight years prior the district sent a Republican to the State Senate. With a campaign of effort, active energy and brains, coupled with some very aggressive thoughts, this young man went to the New York State Legislature representing his district. His efforts and his achievements were such that he was re-elected by a large majority. All of you are no doubt familiar with his record in that body. He made a record which really brought him National fame. He is here to-day in one of our greatest departments, representing, second in command, the great Ameri-can Navy. His interest in the sailor-man is well known; his interest in the upbuilding of the Navy is well known; and I am certain the same energy and efforts heretofore put by him in all his other undertakings are going to mean much for the American Navy in the future.

I take great pleasure in presenting to you the Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, who has kindly consented to speak to you to-night on Suburban Develop-ment. (Applause.)

Mr. Roosevelt: Mr. President and gentlemen, you have

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heard of my connection with the Navy. That is, I think, probably why I have been chosen to speak upon the problem of Suburban Development -- that is one reason, and the other is that I do not know anything about suburban development. (Laughter.) I would say I have never had any active part personally in developing a suburb, but it happens to be a subject that I have given a good deal of consideration and study to in a rather cursory way. It so happens that in that this particular district which has been referred to/I had the honor to represent in the Senate up at Albany in the State of New York -- which was a country district essentially, but which had two small cities in it, one of them 15,000 inhabitants the other 30,000; and that gave me a point of view of suburban development from the outlook of a small city; and at the same time I had been practicing law in the City of New York for a good many years, and in that way I came in touch with the big city's idea.

What I am going to say to you tonight in the way of suburban development is not probably what most of you would have expected. By "Suburban Development" I do not mean the ordinary development of suburbs, as you and I are hoping to see it -- the suburbs within the city limits. I do not want to talk about the fifty-foot lot or the 100-foot lots; that you and I see constantly being developed with a short distance of the cities and within a short distance of Washington. I have only been here since last March, but I have had the privilege of going about this city a good deal. I have seen the kind of development that has taken place in the suburbs of Washington on this side

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of the Potomac River; I have seen nothing on the other side, but I have been told about it. I do not want talk about what I have seen. I want to talk about something that does not exist in the City of Washington, about something which ought to exist in the City of Washington, because you here, people, in my judgment, have got one of the finest opportunities that any citizens of a city in this country, ~~have~~ for carrying out a modern, progressive kind of city development distant in relation to its suburbs.

I happen to know something about the cost of living in Washington. I have discovered it from personal experience. (Laughter.) If I had not discovered it from personal experience I would have discovered it from my connection with the Navy Department. I am going to be perfectly frank. I think it is the best way. You probably all know that last year at the Washington Navy Yard a board was appointed, at the request of the employees, to consider the question of the cost of living in Washington, in relation to their wages. Probably some of you are familiar with the fact that that board, composed the officers and employees, arrived at the conclusion that the cost of living in Washington, that is to say, the price of food and the price of rents was from 10 to 15 per cent higher than in the neighboring cities. I wondered why. And every time I have gone out into the suburbs I have kept on wondering why it was necessary. I have kept on wondering why this place, for the man who is getting \$1,000, \$1200 or \$1500 a year, is not as desirable to live in, from the point of view of economics as other cities in the neighborhood.

We know, for instance, that in Baltimore rents are cheaper, a great deal cheaper, than they are here. We know that the cost of food in Baltimore is a great deal cheaper than it is here. I do not think that that is open to dispute, as far as you and I can tell from the reports of people who have studied the subject.

There is a city in my old district by the name of Poughkeepsie, which was up against very much the same problem. The City of Poughkeepsie was comparatively small. Politically it was owned body and soul by a boss and his few henchmen. The streets were badly paved. It did not have any of the conveniences that a city should have. And in spite of that it had nothing to compensate for the lack of municipal improvements. In other words, it did not have a low cost of living. What happened? They have got a Chamber of Commerce up there in the City of Poughkeepsie. That was dead. I think it was founded somewhere around 1870, and after a few meetings it practically ~~died~~ died. Along about six or eight years ago there arose a young man in that city, who was the cashier of the Savings Bank. He became the Mayor of the City in an uprising against the power of a boss. He issued bonds for new schools, for new pavements, for new lighting, for new sewer system, for new water works. The tax rate went up. Yes. What did it go up from? It went up from ~~last year~~ \$22 to \$24; that is all. But that was not the chief thing that that young man did. He did something bigger than putting in all the municipal improvements which a city has got to have -- pavements, lighting, sewage, water works. That has to

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go without saying. That is to be assumed by the average Chamber of Commerce and by the average citizen of the place. They are his of right. But this mayor did something more. He started that Chamber of Commerce going, during his second term, and that Chamber of Commerce to-day is accomplishing the bigger thing; they are reaching out into the country round about the city. They are developing it, ~~inexpensively~~ not on the plan of the small suburban home, on a lot 50-feet wide and 100-feet deep, or even a hundred feet square ~~for~~ even an acre in size. They are developing it ~~on~~ in the theory giving ~~making~~ every man who wants it a chance to make a living, or of reducing his cost of living, who through owning a piece of land large enough to keep a cow, to raise a few chickens on, to raise a few vegetables on and, if he wants to, to get into his work in the city easily and quickly.

We are confronted, I think, to-day -- I know we are in New York -- with some pretty big problems. Washington has not got to the size ~~yet~~ yet of having those horrible problems that we have in New York. We have not got in Washington the prospect of starvation staring a pretty big percentage of the people in the face from day to day. But, Washington is a growing city; Washington is a kind of a city that may have to face those problems within our life time. And Washington will face those problems unless organizations like the Chamber of Commerce get to work now and are forehanded and try to work out the situation in some way that will meet those problems and prevent the existance of those problems, if possible.

The situation in New York, of course, has been allowed

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to grow like "Topsy" -- nobody has cared. Geographically New York is badly situated, distinctly, with the river on all sides. Washington has not those same problems. New York, to-day, for instance, is talking about sending \$20,000,000 or about \$20,000,000, to get a line railroad down on the west side along the Hudson River to a central market -- that is only one line of railroad, down to one central market that will supply one small section of the city. If they had thought about that 20 years ago they could have done it for \$1,000,000. I do not think that is an exaggeration. The trouble we are apt to talk about these things and not get anything done.

It reminds me of the small ~~my~~ boy in school. The teacher asked him a problem in arithmetic, and said, "Willie, if your father can do a piece of work in seven days and your Uncle William can do it in nine, how long would it take them both together to do that piece of work?" Willie thought for a minute, and then he looked up and said, "Teacher, that is all right, but if father and Uncle William started to do it they would never get through, because they would be telling fish stories." (Laughter.)

If we tell "fish stories" about this kind of thing, if we take it up from the point of view that some day Washington may need a complete market system, some day Washington may need the development of the food supply close at hand, we will never get it, or if we do get it we will get it ~~now~~ at an exorbitant price.

In New York, to go on a little further, if they carry out their plans as they intend to do, as they will do, as

they must do at the present time, a complete and thorough system of markets, they must do what? They must ~~xxxx~~ run a line of railway -- subway, mind you, not surface -- or else elevated -- probably it will be subway -- down the Hudson River, to a central market in lower New York, where the island is narrow. They will have to run some kind of transportation, whether it be a tube or an elevated or something else, down to the great East Side or upper New York; they will have to run different transportation systems into the Bronx; they will have to run them into Queensborough, which used to be old Long Island City; they will have to run them into Brooklyn. Think of the cost?

And every time they run those transportation systems in, they have got to buy land which is about the most expensive land in the city, and they have got to put on that land a municipal market. What is that going to cost? Who is going to get the benefit? The tax payers are going to pay it in the beginning; they are going to pay the money. I am sorry to say some of the money has been paid and it has gone into the pockets of the men who knew where those markets were going, and they got the profit. We are hoping that under the new administration the land will be properly and honestly bought or ~~xxxxxxxx~~ condemned.

Here is the thing. Every bit of food, practically, that comes into New York City comes in by railroad car. On Long Island they have developed the trucking business to a certain extent -- I do not know what the figures are ~~are~~ the proportion of food that comes into New York City other than the long-distance supply. There are a few truck gardens

in Long Island, a very few in West Chester, from the north; a very few in New Jersey, situated at distances where they can be brought in by motor truck or by dray with horses. I do not for a minute believe that that supply exceeds one-tenth of one percent of the food supply of New York. I have even heard it figured it was less than that. What is the answer? The people of New York have got to pay higher for their food than if they had a continuous source close by.

Some of you people probably know the system by which the City of Paris is fed. If you have ever left the City of Paris at daylight or if you have come in late in the afternoon, around dusk, you will remember the great arteries, the spider's web of roads that lead into that city, all coming to the common center. In the morning every road is packed with a continuous line of great two-wheeled carts, drawn perhaps by two Percheron horses, coming into market. They may start twenty-five miles away from Paris. They will start sometimes at seven or eight o'clock the night before and come in on a walk, with the driver asleep. If you want to try to go by him in a machine, it will take you about half an hour before you can wake the fellow up. Those carts come into Paris by the thousands. Of course, they have a system that we do not particularly believe in. They have what we call "Ox-cart" tax, by which every cart pays a certain customs to the municipality of Paris, and that helps to pay for the municipal government. That system, of course, does not exist in this country any way, so far as I know. But, here is the

point: Those carts contain about 75 per cent of the food supply of the people of Paris. Paris, while it is not as large as New York, has got, as I remember it, pretty close to two million inhabitants.

Coming back to the small city that I am talking about, Poughkeepsie -- we only have 30,000 inhabitants -- we are developing there this system by which the man who earns \$1,000 or \$1200 or \$1500 a year -- and that is the average salary of the man with a family in our town -- I am not speaking about the bachelors now; they do not want farms yet -- but married men with families on that salary and with that income can with us go five, six or seven miles out of town and buy five acres, let us say at \$100 an acre. He can do it on the installment plan, and the Chamber of Commerce through its sub-organizations, enables that man to put up his house, to stock his farm, just exactly in the same way that any suburban real estate proposition is run or a building and loan association. It is cooperative; it is non-speculative, and that is one of the chief points. The whole success lies in making the people believe, making them understand thoroughly that you are doing this thing from purely a purpose that is honest and non-speculative; that you are doing it for the good not only of them, but for the people in the city who cannot get out there.

A man with five acres around Washington can, I take it, do a good deal better than a man with five acres in Dutchess County. From what I have seen of the land around Washington, I am surprised at only one thing -- I am talking now about the farm land outside -- and that is that the price of

it is not higher. It is good land fundamentally. I think that the Department of Agriculture says that. In fact, I have been talking to a good many of the people in Department, and they tell me that the average ~~few~~ land around Washington is good land for agricultural purposes.

I happened to go down the Potomac River, and I have been shocked ~~that~~ ^{wholly} that a river should be lined with great country places, a river that should be given up to intensive agriculture, and there it lies, land selling at \$15, \$20 and \$25 an acre, and I imagine \$25 is pretty high for a good deal of that land on the lower Potomac.

I think that the Chamber of Commerce is the kind of an organization that can take this matter up; it is a big matter; it is a matter that will bring the Chamber into touch, possibly into conflict, with a good many concerns. In Poughkeepsie, for instance, it was found that there was no use in developing small farm tracts, unless you could get the transportation before you began to sell. That goes without saying. If you want to develop a suburban piece of property, you want the trolley there first, before you have your auction sale. I do not know anything about Washington trolleys, except you can get six tickets for twenty-five cents, which is more than you can do in New York, which has its advantages. I believe that a trolley company that is run by the right kind of people, run by people who have got civic pride, will extend a short distance beyond the purely house-and-lot type of suburban development. A fairly cheap construction can be put in at first, and comparatively few number of cars can be put on at first, but it will pay a trolley company in the long

run, and it has been proved in a dozen, yes, a hundred cities in this country.

The other thing is this: A trolley company is not any good unless it transports more than passengers. We have a lot in the East to learn from trolley development in the West and suburban development in the West. I do not believe there is a trolley line in the State of Ohio that does not ~~run~~ run an express car at reasonable rates. I do not suppose there is a city of any size in Ohio that has not got its association or truck growers in the suburbs who have arranged to have the/goods picked up at the various farms and left at the gate or brought to a central point near town, to be put on board this car and taken to a market.

In New York State last year I put through a bill to establish cooperative farmers associations. Those associations are ~~formal~~ forming to-day in the State of New York. Although they are all young yet, it looks as if the whole proposition was going to be a success.

Farmers are handicapped, compared with city people every time, because they cannot find out -- the average farmer cannot find out how to get his supplies the cheapest and how to sell his product at the highest prices. These cooperative associations are formed not for gain of the association, but to enable the incorporators and to enable the members of the association to buy as far as possible at wholesale and sell as far as possible at what approximates the retail rate in the cities.

I believe that you have the opportunity to start that kind of cooperative work in Washington. It has struck me very forcibly that five miles out in almost any direction you choose from where we are tonight you will find what is practically farm land. I think that is true. If that is not so, I wish somebody would contradict me. That farm land may not be farm land tomorrow. Probably five miles out, especially in the Northeast and the Northwest sections, the land is held pretty high -- ten miles then, 12 miles, 15 miles, and what do you find? Probably you and I would not like to run our automobiles out fifteen miles on some of the roads near Washington. I do not doubt that I can go across the river tomorrow and pick up land at a good deal less than \$100 an acre, and it will not be ten miles or fifteen miles from Washington -- Am I right?

(A Voice: "Right," and "Yes, sir.")

This is a city movement; it is not a country movement. In other words it has got to be started from here. You cannot start this kind of a thing in the country. You have got to have co-operation. It is easier to get it in the city. You have got to have capital; it is easier to get it in the city. But it is the kind of thing that is going to bring many back to the city; it is going to give the city a name; it is going to make the city a place where people will be pretty proud to hail from, not only because it happens ~~to~~ under the Federal law to be the capital of the United States. If I lived in Washington, if I were a citizen of Washington, had lived here all my life and were here in business, I would be more proud to think that Washington was celebrated or famed

for its market facilities, for its transportation facilities, for its farms, for its civic pride than I would to come simply from the capital of the United States. And that is the attitude of a good many Washington people. I am glad to see that down here one sees a good deal of civic spirit. Even the papers are full of it all the time, about this organization and that organization, always talking civic spirit and civic pride. # Perhaps this talk has been a little critical of Washington. It has not meant to be so, because along these lines, along the idea of development in the outer suburbs, of farm development, of market development, things have not been accomplished in any city in this country, except possibly in some of the cities of the Middle West. Certainly no city in the East has progressed in this way nearly as far as a great many cities have on the other side of the Ocean. We have got a lot to learn, but do not forget that the problem is one that will overtake us unless we fore-stall it, and if it overtakes us it is going to cost us a lot more to get rid of it than if we took hold of it now.

We have got to think sometimes about the headlines in the papers that read "75 cents a dozen for eggs." (Laughter.) My better-half assures me that eggs are not really as high as that in Washington; but the papers say so. The problem is distinctly one of the cost of living. The cost of living can be put down; it can be decreased by having available a supply of vegetables and milk and cream, eggs and chickens within motoring or driving or trolley distance of your own

city. It is a problem, a very simple problem, in Arithmetic; and we ought to approach it from the point of view of economics and of Arithmetic.

It reminds me of another little boy who was in school, and the teacher said, "Johnny, we are doing subtraction now. You must understand that when you subtract one thing from another you have got to have the same denominator; in other words, you cannot subtract two peaches from three apples, nor eight pigs from three cows. Well, but," said Johnny, "is that so?" Teacher said, "Yes, that is perfectly self-evident if you will think about it." The boy replied, "But, teacher, it cannot be so. I know that you can take two quarts of milk from one cow." (Laughter.)

Our problem here is to get two quarts of milk from one cow. It looks fairly simple, and it is really simple. There are so many people who have studied this subject. I have only studied it in a very cursory way. I have studied it chiefly because I had a city which had to study it, if it was going to make good; and also because in the City of New York I was a member of two commissions to inquire into the market problem. In New York you and I have got to pay for our household bill not the price of the vegetables nor of the meat alone, plus a fair profit to the middleman. We have got to pay for the middleman's rent, and that is tremendously high. But in order to get around that, in order to save the poor man from paying an enormous rent, in order to save him from paying five different commissions

sometimes there are five of them, we have got to establish somekind of a market system which will be municipally owned and controlled. I think that is the best way. There are other ways of arriving at it. Secondly, getting a source of supply that is close at home. Let me give you one example that came to my personal notice last year. I went down along the docks at 2.30 in the morning; and I found a crate of spinach which had come up from Norfolk, Virginia, by boat. That crate was consigned to a certain firm of commission merchants. That firm of commission merchants took it off the steamer, and put it on this great, long pier. The buyers came in there, and in this particular case the commission merchant sold it to another commission merchant, who was his partner. That is easy. He sold it to him for 85 cents for the crate; and he sent the 85 cents back to the farmer near Norfolk, after first taking out, I suppose, the cost of transportation from Norfolk to New York. His partner took that crate across the street, and there he sold it to a wholesale jobber; and he sold it to the wholesale jobber for \$1.05. As a matter of fact, of course, the first commission merchant took his commission out of the 85 cents, and ~~in~~ he also got his share of the 25 cents that his partner got in selling it to the jobber. The jobber took it and sold it to a wholesale truckman, I think they who came down from the Bronx with a large motor truck called him; ^A and this truckman bought it from the jobber for \$1.40 -- this same crate of spinach -- and he sold it up in the Bronx to the distributing agent for the Bronx, at

\$1.60. That paid for his gasoline and a little bit more. He did not make much money. Nobody has made much money so far. The distributing agent sold it to some Italian who ran a corner grocery; and he sold it to him for \$1.80, I think it was, or \$1.90. It went from him to the Italian who ran the corner grocery. It was parceled out, of course, in small packages to the ultimate consumer. The ultimate consumer, we know, cannot buy a whole crate of spinach. There is a certain amount of loss; but the ultimate consumer paid at the rate of \$2.50 for that spinach; and that spinach arrived in New York that same morning from Norfolk. Probably the farmer got about 60 cents; and it was sold for \$2.50.

There is an example of bad city management, of bad citizenship, and it is an example that shows that you have got to take time by the forelock. I have absolutely no question in my mind that if the people in Washington let things go without any changes, if Washington were to develop along the same lines that New York has developed, you will be up against the same problem that New York is up against, and it will cost you pretty nearly as much money to remedy those problems as it is taking in New York. I think now is the time to do it. # We all, even those of us who are living in Washington only temporarily, even those of us who have come here recently, want to help. I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that every member of this administration who has come to Washington for the first time is only too anxious and ready to do all that they can to help this very wonderful city. Of course, I personally have been here

many times before for a short time. I did spend two winters here in Mr. Cleveland's first administration, but I confess that I do not remember the experience very well, because I was about six years old at the time. (Laughter.)

If this Administration can do anything to help the development of Washington along modern, scientific and far-reaching lines, lines of seeking to remedy not only a condition that exists today, but lines that will constantly keep in mind the development of Washington as the great, the most splendid city of this country -- if we can do that, if we can persuade you of our readiness and willingness to help, then we shall be very well satisfied.

Gentlemen, I am very glad to have been here, and I feel that I would like to help in this development of Washington. I know that you gentlemen are sincerely interested in this city; but I want you to feel that other people, people who perhaps are here for a short time are almost equally interested and are willing to help.

I thank you. (Prolonged applause.)

Mr. Moran. Being interested in the high cost of living, I was particularly gratified to hear the splendid address by our distinguished guest, and I feel certain that all of our members are more than pleased that he came here this evening.

I move that a rising vote of thanks be tendered the distinguished speaker for his eloquent, able and interesting address.

The motion was seconded.

President Callahan. Gentlemen, you have heard the mo-

tion properly seconded. As many as favor will please signify by arising.

The entire audience arose.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON.

Suburban Development -

Not suburban from point of view of 25 ft lots on 50 or 100 ft. lots -

At least 1 acre - up to 10 acres

Present problem : Cheap food & fresh air.

Problem of the average man with a family - at say \$1,000 a year to 2,000.

Problem to be solved in small city - before it grows.

Transportation - Trolley - Roads.
Markets More than one

N.Y. City

Washington - In ideal situation
Needs - a.

Non speculative building
Local agriculture
small farmers

b. Transportation

Cooperative selling & compact markets.

Bobby Was Observant

The teacher was hearing the youthful class in mathematics.

"Now," she said, "in order to subtract, things have to be in the same denomination. For instance, we couldn't take three pears from four peaches, nor eight horses from ten cats. Do you understand?"

There was assent from the majority of pupils. One little boy in the rear raised a timid hand.

"Well, Bobby, what is it?" asked teacher.

"Please, teacher," said Bobby, "couldn't you take three quarts of milk from two cows?"

A Case in Arithmetic

The teacher was hearing her class of small boys in mathematics.

"Edgar," she said, "if your father can do a piece of work in seven days, and your Uncle William can do it in nine days, how long would it take both of them to do it?"

"They would never get it done," answered the boy, earnestly. "They would sit down and tell fish stories."



1913 (?)

Speech before the
Chamber of Commerce,
Washington, D. C.,

Nov. 11, 1913.

- R. F. G.