Franklin D. Roosevelt — "The Great Communicator"

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt's Political Ascension

File No. 177

1920 September 23

Rochester, NY - Campaign Speech

Rochester NY Sept 22nd 20

While it is my purpose to devote the greater part of my address to the League of Nations, I desire first to discuss some of the very grave home problems which must come up for solution during the coming four years. I want to call particular attention to the two big domestic problems of taxation and of government reform, and to lay special emphasis on the fact which nobody can deny that the present Republican Congress, in existence since the Fourth of March, 1919, has accomplished literally nothing towards the solution of these questions. It is a simple matter of history that the present Congress has had every opportunity to do something; more than that, that it has been repeatedly called to the attention of Congress that something ought to be done. It is also a simple matter of history that the present Congress, dominated by a safe Republican margin in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, determined, through its Republican leaders over a year ago, that it would spend its whole time in seeking to discover scandals in a Democratic Administration, and by political tricks try to put the opposition on the defensive. This, of course, was the purpose of the dozens of costly investigations which were undertaken by this Republican Congress.

I know from having been in Washington during this period, and from having conversed as lately as this Spring with a great many personal friends in the Republican camp that they were bitterly disappointed that the investigations had failed to disclose graft and waste as they had hoped. It seems to me a very dreadful commentary on the point of view of some of our so-called leaders when they actually admit disappointment that the American Government cannot be proved crooked or spendthrift. It

is simply another proof that the present leaders of the Republican Party are wholly misrepresentative of the rank and file of their party, because they place party gain above the national good.

But it is not only on the record of the past that we must judge. We must not only show by the failure of this Congress to take hold of the important domestic problems requiring constructive measures, but we must also examine into what both parties propose to do in case either should be successful.

It is true that the present Republican Congress has failed to do anything about the present taxes of the nation. The only suggestion in their platform is to relieve the country of burdensome taxes. They do not state or suggest how they would do it. Their candidate for the Presidency also has been, as usual, wholly vague on the subject. If we assume that a Republican Congress would in the next four years take some action, the people of this country are entitled to know what kind of action they would take. Past history has shown that it is Republican doctrine to levy indirect taxes in such form that the individual consumer pays the tax, whether he be a rich man or a poor man in approximately equal amounts. This means, first, that the taxes pass along from the producer to the consumer, and secondly, that those who possess wealth do not pay taxes in proportion to their possessions. The Democratic doctrine is, of course, opposite. The Democratic Party was the father of the Income Tax, a system which has been adopted by every great nation on earth, and a system which proceeds on the theory that a citizen should help support his Government more generously if he is the possessor of great wealth than if he has but little. It is a fair tax, and it brings the burden of taxation on those who can best afford it. The present system of

taxation has been a great factor in bringing general prosperity to the nation, and of bringing this prosperity not only to those who have money but also to the general average of the working classes in our population. We believe in a continuation of the present theory of taxation with, however, a modification of the rates and amounts to be levied. Especially is this true in regard to such portion of the excess profits tax as can be proved to be a real hindrance to the development of sound business and commerce. In other words, the Democratic nominees believe in a broadened opportunity of success for the xxx individual citizen and to curbing unreasonable profits especially where these profits are made on the necessities of life and are paid for in the long run by the consuming public.

Here is another question that ought to be asked in regard to the reduction of taxation in the immediate future. Do the people want it done under the leadership of a President who has had splendid experience in an executive position during six years as Governor of a great State and who has placed the tx system of his own state on a sound basis for the benefit of xx all the people of his State, or do they want it done under the leadership of a President who has had no executive experience, who has spent his whole public life in talking and not doing, and who has been closely affiliated in political thought and theory with the oldtime reactionary Senators accustomed in the past to think more of how a tariff schedule will affect a friendly trust or of how a particular tax will affect the fortunes of friendly bosses than to consider the matter from the view point of sound economy, and the welfare of the average citizen.

In regard to the other problem, that of putting the Government on a business basis, the same line of argument holds good. It is a Republican Congress which since March 4, 1919, has utterly failed to heed the demand:

of the Administration and of the nation for legislation. A splendid report for the reclassification of the Government service and for the proper treatment of Government employes was presented to this Congress, but they failed to act on it in any shape or manner. They were asked to take up the question of redistributing the functions of the various departments of the Government so as to remedy systems which had been proved inadequate or unscientifically organized as a result of increased war activities. The Republican Congress did nothing, it was too busily engaged in playing politics.

Now it is perfectly true that the Government Departments ought to be reorganized, Government employment ought to be made a model for the rest of the country instead of what it is under existing law. Much duplication of work now necessary under existing law should be eliminated by consolidation. The overhead expenses can be greatly reduced by the same process. There should be a businesslike budget system. Literally the only effort made by the present Republican Congress was to pass a budget bill which the President of the United States was forced to veto because it was unconstitutional. In other words, it proceeded along the theory that the Senate of the United States should conduct a budget system of the Departments rather than under the Constitutional theory that this work belonged to the executive branch of the Government. It was a clear usurpation of administrative functions by the legislative branch.

But Government reform should certainly not stop with the Departments. The legislative methods themselves are far more antiquated and wasteful considering the cost of the Congress of the United States to the taxpayers of the country. It is an unwieldly, unbusinesslike and badly organized body. After all, Congress is the power which creates the departments and authorizes the funds for running them. Just so long as Congress

proceeds along its present ineffective lines, playing politics and filling thousands of pages of the Congressional Record with speeches which have never been delivered, it is idle to expect substantial improvment in other branches of the Government whose very existence depends on Congress itself.

The Republican Party leaders have expressed no definite measures to remedy these faults. Democratic leaders have proposed them. We advocate reclassification of the Government service, reorganization and consolidation of the Departments, reorganization of the business of Congress itself, and a deliberate and continuing effort to make the Government of the United States measure up in successful efficiency with the standards of at least the average business concern in the United States.

Which program do you favor? What type of man do you want to handle this big questions in the next four years? Again we are faced with the alternative of choosing a practical executive who has made good along these very lines for six years as the head of a great State, or of choosing a gentleman who is not an executive and who is wedded to the old fashioned Senatorial methods --- delay, inaction, partisanship.

Rochester, N.Y. - Sept 2 - 1920

While it is my purpose to devote the greater part of my address to the League of Nations, I desire first to discuss some of the very grave home problems which must come up for solution during the coming four years. I want to call particular attention to the two big domestic problems of taxation and of government reform, and to lay special emphasis on the fact which nobody can deny that the present Republican Congress, in existence since the Fourth of March, 1919, has accomplished literally nothing towards the solution of these questions. It is a simple matter of history that the present Congress has had every opportunity to do something; more than that, that it has been repeatedly called to the attention of Congress that something ought to be done. It is also a simple matter of history that the present Congress, dominated by a safe Republican margin in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, determined, through its Republican leaders over a year ago, that it would spend its whole time in seeking to discover scandals in a Democratic Administration, and by political tricks try to put the opposition on the defensive. This, of course, was the purpose of the dozens of costly investigations which were undertaken by this Republican Congress.

I know from having been in Washington during this period, and from having conversed as lately as this Spring with a great many personal friends in the Republican camp that they were bitterly disappointed that the investigations had failed to disclose graft and waste as they had hoped. It seems to me a very dreadful commentary on the point of view of some of our so-called leaders when they actually admit disappointment that the American Government cannot be proved crooked or spendthrift. It

is simply another proof that the present leaders of the Republican Party are wholly misrepresentative of the rank and file of their party, because they place party gain above the national good.

But it is not only on the record of the past that we must judge. We must not only show by the failure of this Congress to take hold of the important domestic problems requiring constructive measures, but we must also examine into what both parties propose to do in case either should be successful.

It is true that the present Republican Congress has failed to do anything about the present taxes of the nation. The only suggestion in their platform is to relieve the country of burdensome taxes. They do not state or suggest how they would do it. Their candidate for the Presidency also has been, as usual, wholly vague on the subject. If we assume that a Republican Congress would in the next four years take some action, the people of this country are entitled to know what kind of action they would take. Past history has shown that it is Republican doctrine to levy indirect taxes in such form that the individual consumer pays the tax, whether he be a rich man or a poor man in approximately equal amounts. This means, first, that the taxes pass along from the producer to the consumer, and secondly, that those who possess wealth do not pay taxes in proportion to their possessions. The Democratic doctrine is, of course, opposite. The Democratic Party was the father of the Income Tax, a system which has been adopted by every great nation on earth, and a system which proceeds on the theory that a citizen should help support his Government more generously if he is the possessor of great wealth than if he has but little. It is a fair tax, and it brings the burden of taxation on those who can best afford it. The present system of

taxation has been a great factor in bringing general prosperity to the nation, and of bringing this prosperity not only to those who have money but also to the general avera e of the working classes in our population. We believe in a continuation of the present theory of taxation with, however, a modification of the rates and amounts to be levied. Especially is this true in regard to such portion of the excess profits tax as can be proved to be a real hindrance to the development of sound business and commerce. In other words, the Democratic nominees believe in a broadened opportunity of success for the xxx individual citizen and to curbing unreasonable profits especially where these profits are made on the necessities of life and are paid for in the long run by the consuming public.

Here is another question that ought to be asked in regard to the reduction of taxation in the immediate future. Do the people want it done under the leadership of a President who has had splendid experience in an executive position during six years as Governor of a great State and who has placed the tx system of his own state on a sound basis for the benefit of xx all the people of his State, or do they want it done under the leadership of a President who has had no executive experience, who has spent his whole public life in talking and not doing, and who has been closely affiliated in political thought and theory with the oldtime reactionary Senators accustomed in the past to think more of how a tariff schedule will affect a friendly trust or of how a particular tax will affect the fortunes of friendly bosses than to consider the matter from the view point of sound economy, and the welfare of the average citizen.

In regard to the other problem, that of putting the Government on a business basis, the same line of argument holds good. It is a Republican Congress which since March 4, 1919, has utterly failed to heed the demands

of the Administration and of the nation for legislation. A splendid report for the reclassification of the Government service and for the proper treatment of Government employes was presented to this Congress, but they failed to act on it in any shape or manner. They were asked to take up the question of redistributing the functions of the various departments of the Government so as to remedy systems which had been proved inadequate or unscientifically organized as a result of increased war activities. The Republican Congress did nothing, it was too busily engaged in playing politics.

Now it is perfectly true that the Government Departments ought to be reorganized, Government employment ought to be made a model for the rest of the country instead of what it is under existing law. Much duplication of work now necessary under existing law should be eliminated by consolidation. The overhead expenses can be greatly reduced by the same process. There should be a businesslike budget system. Literally the only effort made by the present Republican Congress was to pass a budget bill which the President of the United States was forced to veto because it was unconstitutional. In other words, it proceeded along the theory that the Senate of the United States should conduct xkm a budget system of the Departments rather than under the Constitutional theory that this work belonged to the executive branch of the Government. It was a clear usurpation of administrative functions by the legislative branch.

But Government reform should certainly not stop with the Departments. The legislative methods themselves are far more atiquated and wasteful considerking the cost of the Congress of the United States to the taxpayers of the country. It is an unwieldly, unbusinesslike and badly organized body. After all, Congress is the power which creates the departments and authorizes the funds for running them. Just so long as Congress

proceeds along its present ineffective lines, playing politics and filling thousands of pages of the Congressional Record with speeches which have never been delivered, it is idle to expect substantial improvment in other branches of the Government whose very existence depends on Congress itself.

The Republican Party leaders have expressed no definite measures to remedy these faults. Democratic leaders have proposed them. We advocate reclassification of the Government service, reorganization and consolidation of the Departments, reorganization of the business of Congress itself, and a deliberate and continuing effort to make the Government of the United States measure up in successful efficiency with the standards of at least the average business concern in the United States.

Which program do you favor? What type of man do you want to handle this big questions in the next four years? Again we are faced with the alternative of choosing a practical executive who has made good along these very lines for six years as the head of a great State, or of choosing a gentleman who is not an executive and who is wedded to the old fashioned Senatorial methods --- delay, inaction, partisanship.

While it is my purpose to devote the greater part of my address to the League of Nations, I desire first to discuss some of the very grave home problems which must come up for solution during the coming four years. I want to call particular attention to the two big domestic problems of taxation and of government reform, and to lay special emphasis on the fact which nobody can deny that the present Republican Congress, in existence since the Fourth of March, 1919, has accomplished literally nothing towards the solution of these questions. It is a simple matter of history that the present Congress has had every opportunity to do something; more than that, that it has been repeatedly called to the attention of Congress that something ought to be done. It is also a simple matter of history that the present Congress, dominated by a safe Republican margin in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, determined, through its Republican leaders over a year ago, that it would spend its whole time in seeking to discover scandals in a Democratic Administration, and by political tricks try to put the opposition on the defensive. This, of course, was the purpose of the dozens of costly investigations which were undertaken by this Republican Congress.

I know from having been in Washington during this period, and from having conversed as lately as this Spring with a great many personal friends in the Republican camp that they were bitterly disappointed that the investigations had failed to disclose graft and waste as they had hoped. It seems to me a very dreadful commentary on the point of view of some of our so-called leaders when they actually admit disappointment that the American Government cannot be proved crooked or spendthrift. It