
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 267

1928 October 18

Elmira, NY - Campaign Speech

WISNER PARK, ELMIRA. Speech, Oct 18

Open Air Meeting. Oct 18, 1928.

Five P. M., October 18, 1928.

My friends of Elmira, I am not a new visitor in this city; I have been here many times before. You know, I come from upstate myself, anyway. The first time I was here I think was about twenty years ago, when I came down here for a week-end as the guest of one of the finest men who was ever born or lived in the State of New York, my intimate personal friend, John F. Murtaugh, and many of you know him and his untimely taking was a loss not merely to this community, but to the whole State. And the last time I was here was, I think, eight years ago, and the Mayor reminded me as we were driving into town of the fact that I spoke in a theatre here and that somebody -- I would hate to say it was a Republican who turned out all the lights -- while this time, while it is getting dark, it is the fault of Dame Nature and not of the opposite political party. (Laughter)

I am glad to come here. It was not on the way to

and that is why I am here for the Republican campaign this year

schedule that I should make any formal speech, so I am here just to greet you, to tell you that I am mighty glad to come back through the State of New York, my State, and I want to talk to you very briefly about one or two things that I have found in this campaign, because during the past two months I have been doing a good deal of travelling. I have been South and I have been out in the Middle West, and I have been in New England, and there is a new spirit abroad in the air. There is no question that this year the people of the United States are thinking. It is reflected everywhere in greater registration, in greater interest, in public meetings, in a more careful sifting of the actual issues.

And there is another significant thing on the one side -- and I am speaking not just to Democrats -- I am speaking to Republicans, too, because it is right that we Democrats should speak to Republicans -- in the final analysis we can't carry the United States without the help of Republican votes. We have had that help before, and I believe that every sign this year points to our getting more help from Republican votes than ever before in our history. But one thing is very clear to me, and that is this: that the Republican campaign this year

is a re-warmed dinner prepared for eight, twelve and sixteen years ago. They have carefully taken out of the ice-box -- I am not referring to the chilly White House -- they are taking out from their party ice-box, all the same old stories that they have used before. They are telling the country how wonderfully prosperous it is, and all I can tell you people here in Elmira is that I hope to Heaven that you people are as prosperous, that the dinner pails are as full in this State as Mr. Hoover and Mr. Ottinger and other Republican leaders would have you believe.

I don't know enough about conditions here. You know far better than I do, but I am very certain that in a great many parts of the country that prosperity is a paper prosperity. Go into New England and see their closed mills. Go out West and find the abandoned farms, the lack of purchasing power, and the cities that are suffering as a consequence. Go down South. No, this prosperity is a political one in very large part.

And then they are talking to you about some of the outworn things, the old hash about the tariff. Well, the tariff isn't in politics any more. Alfred E.

Smith has taken it out once and for all. And on the other side of the picture, see the issues that they are presenting. They are keeping mighty silent about some of them. They are keeping mighty silent about some of the broken promises to this nation. They are not saying much about their promises to the farming communities of the United States made in 1920, and again in 1924, and again in 1928. They are not talking to you about other broken promises, the reorganization of the Federal Government -- and the Lord knows it needs it down there more than it even needed it up in Albany before Smith did it.

Their campaign -- I mean their official campaign, because there is another side to it -- their official campaign is singularly lacking in imagination. It is the same old stuff and side by side with their official campaign somebody - I don't know who - is conducting another kind of a campaign that they do not allow to see the light of day. So, taking it by and large, I am beginning to think that the Republican leaders are rather bankrupt. I am beginning to think that they haven't got much to run on in this campaign. And what is the other side of the picture? Col. Lehman, Mr. Tremaine, Mr.

Conway, have talked to you about that broad issue of progress on one side and reaction on the other. We believe in the State of New York we have got a rather definite record to run on, one that you know, because it has come home close to every citizen of this State.

During the past six years the Governor of this State has made us famous all over the United States -- famous for progress. He has made the State famous and he has made himself famous, because he is a man that has promised things and then has gone out and kept his promises (Applause).

Our campaign in both state and nation this year is based on two things: First, that we will keep our promises, and, secondly, that if we are returned to office we will put into Washington the same kind of splendid program we have seen in Albany these past two years, and continue that splendid program in Albany for at least another two. (Applause.)

There is a lot to be done. Things change and it is a mighty good thing that they do. I believe in change, and I believe that the people of this State are going to back me up in their belief in change. We have

got countless tasks ahead in this State. It isn't merely a question of rounding out that splendid program of Governor Smith. There is more to be done, and each year we have got to accomplish a little more to keep up with the times because the times move. And if even for two years this State elects people to carry on its government who haven't got imagination, who haven't got an understanding of the needs that come with the passing years, even two years of that will throw us so far back that it will take many more to catch up.

I want to give you one very simple example of what I mean by that theory. You know that during the past two years this State has been engaged on a great program, a program for the rebuilding of the state institutions. Way back -- I was going to say when I was small, but it was before that -- back in the sixty's and seventy's, before I was born, we engaged in a great program in this State of building hospitals, insane asylums, prisons and camps, and various other things for the care of the wards of the State. Then, while additions were made from time to time, it didn't seem to be anybody's business up in Albany to see that the facilities

of the State kept up to the needs of the time. is a con-

Governors came and governors went, and we used the same old buildings and the same old outworn facilities that had been in use for fifty years, and it wasn't until Governor Smith, with his usual farsightedness, made a survey of the existing situation and told the people of the State about it, that we realized that we had been just drifting -- drifting farther and farther behind every year.

And so, he went before the people of the State with great courage and asked them to authorize the issuing of bonds for the rebuilding of the old institutions, and the building of new ones to meet the new needs and the people of the State approved of his plans. And today in this State we are undertaking the reconstruction of outworn facilities and reconstruction of new facilities. In other words, we are trying to catch up for a long neglected series of years. That is what I want to stop. I mean I want to stop a recurrence of years up in Albany when the State will fall behind.

We ought not to have to wait until 1950 or 1960 for another Alfred E. Smith to come along and then enable

us to catch up again. What we need in Albany is a continuance of progress. And so, I am very certain that people in this State will, regardless of party, vote this year for a continuance of progress, for a meeting of new conditions in the new spirit that we call "The Spirit of Alfred E. Smith." (Applause.)

And by the same token, the more I go around this State and the more I see of the electorate in the South and the West, and New England, the more certain I am that the people of this country have caught on to what we know here in this State. And they want to see as President, in the first place, a human being instead of an adding machine (laughter and applause); they want to see some warmth back in the White House (laughter). They want to see the problem of the Federal Government attacked with vision, taken hold of by a man who does things, not by a man who promises things. They want to see a man in the White House who will give us a well-rounded prosperity, prosperity not just in a few cities, but in all. Prosperity, not just in the cities, but on the farms. And that is why I am very confident that I am right when I tell you that on the sixth of November next there is

going to be a great surprise in store for some of the leaders of the Republican Party (Applause).

I am not in the least bit worried about this election, because people are taking an interest; and it is a matter of record that in the years when the people take an interest in campaigns, the years when registration increases by leaps and bounds, in those years they send Democrats to Albany and Washington. (Applause.)

And so let me tell you "Goodbye." Let me tell you that I hope I'll be back here the next time in an official capacity (prolonged applause). And one of the greatest privileges that you in this State can give me by electing me Governor is the privilege of getting around to this city and talking with the people face to face, and seeing the finest State in all the Union; of getting that kind of feeling of pride that I have always had in this State, a feeling of pride throughout all this generation; a State that has maintained its leadership through all these generations; a state that is looked up to by all of our sister states; and I want to see them look up to us still more. Thank you. (Prolonged applause.)