
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 281

1928 October 24

Oswego, NY - Campaign Speech

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Mr. Chairman and my friends: I am getting a great kick out of this campaign. (Laughter.) Each day that goes by I think I am entering more and more into the spirit of it. (Laughter.) My dist-

As I was driving up this morning I couldn't help thinking back a little during the past two months of what this country has been going through. To my mind it has been the most interesting political campaign throughout the nation that has ever been held in my lifetime. (Laughter.) It

Of course, every campaign goes through certain periods. During July and the first part of August, before the notification speeches, it is called in the newspaper offices the silly season. Everybody is getting off wise cracks. Everybody is laughing. And then they get into a serious period, and everybody takes himself seriously, and that is a time when it is a mighty good thing for the people to have a sense of humor. That

question of sense of humor becomes increasingly important during the last two weeks of the campaign, for then the nation graduates from the serious period into the panic season, and a lot of other wise, sane people get seized with panic. (Last year, applause.)

This year is no exception to the rule. Night before last in New York, one of the candidates for the Presidency got seized with panic. (Laughter.) My distinguished old friend, Mr. Hoover, began to see red (laughter). Knowing him, I have anticipated this period of panic on his part. I knew it was coming, and it is right on schedule. He made a brilliant speech down there in New York in which he said in effect that Governor Alfred E. Smith was a socialist. (Laughter.) It showed his state of mind. Well, I want to say to my friend, Mr. Hoover, that if Governor Smith is a socialist, then the great vast majority of the inhabitants of the State of New York are socialists, and I'm a socialist, and all of you are socialists, and it is a socialist state. We rather like that kind of socialism. We don't call it socialism, of course, we will it "Social Betterment." And there is all the difference in the world.

as saying, If Mr. Hoover had spoken truly he wouldn't have used the word socialism. He would have used the two words, "Social Betterment", because those two words sum up the great achievements of Alfred E. Smith over the period of the past ten years. (Applause.)

As another evidence of this being a panic season in certain circles, it is interesting to note that what we used to call in the Navy "contact between the various component parts of the Republican Fleet has been lost." One of the squadrons is headed off in one direction, another is headed off in another. It is a divided fleet. They are in the fog, and it is going to be mighty hard for them to get together again before Election Day. (Laughter.) While the Republican candidate for the Presidency was talking about the terrible dangers that would come to this country through even the serious discussion of the great projects for national relief being advocated by Governor Smith, the representatives of Mr. Hoover in this State, my distinguished opponent, Mr. Ottinger, was saying something quite different. Lack of contact. Mr. Ottinger said in Rochester the other day something along this line -- I

am quoting: "But Herbert Hoover goes one step further. He says, 'I shall undertake to wipe out poverty in the nation.'" (Laughter) My friends, when Herbert Hoover wipes out poverty in this nation I will vote for him, (laughter) and I am perfectly safe in making that pledge.

And then Mr. Ottinger goes on and says: "How would he wipe out poverty? By employing men and women upon great public projects like the Boulder Dam, which, while the cost may be big, will inure to the everlasting benefit of the present and future generations. He will present for America gigantic constructive programs the likes of which have never been attempted."

Why, Mr. Ottinger says that Hoover is going in for an enormous public works program -- government work. The government is going to step in in the place of private business. Who said Socialism? (Laughter.) It is all right of course for Mr. Ottinger to talk about what Hoover is going to do down in Washington. Awe! The Government can, down in Washington, approve all sorts of measures for building federal dams and developing federal water power, Boulder Dam, Muscle Shoals, and

so forth, but up here in the State of New York is Mr. Ottinger approving the Government of the State developing the water powers of this State? It depends a great deal on whose baby has the measles. (Laughter and Applause.)

It is just the same way in Mr. Ottinger's now famous speech of acceptance. I counted them. There were forty-three great projects of Mr. Ottinger for spending the money of the people of the State of New York. And I figured out roughly, but fairly accurately with a pencil on the back of an old envelope coming over here -- that those projects would cost the people of the State of New York, not the \$250,000,000 that we are spending on our State Government now each year, but about \$2,500,000,000 each year. (Laughter and Applause.)

And in that very same speech -- of course he wants to reach all elements, all schools of thought in the population of the State -- and he's a very promising gentleman to people who want this, that and the other -- forty-one different varieties of things that cost money. But then he suddenly recalls there are a lot of people in this State that don't like to pay taxes, and so he

goes right on and he says, "Now, gentlemen, now we are going to do something else, too. We are going to reduce everybody's taxes. (Laughter.) We are going to eliminate the income tax. We are going to eliminate all the land taxes for the farmers and by some marvelous slight of hand we are going to spend all this money on all these public improvements in every town and hamlet in the State of New York, and nobody will have to pay taxes any more."

Well, that is why I talked about the silly season in campaigns, and at the end, this panic season. I believe in a sense of humor, in keeping one's feet on the ground and not promising things that you can't carry out. And it seems to me when you come right down to it that it pays -- it pays better in the form of the currency of votes -- Election Day -- to talk basic principles, rather than to hand out promiscuous promises.

That is what our candidate for the Presidency of the United States is going throughout the Union. That is what we in this State are trying to do in our campaign in this State. You know the history of the administration of Governor Smith. During these years this State has

advanced further in the science and practice of government than any other State. We are looked up to and copied by our sister States, and we have great right to be proud of our record. That record has been obtained only by fighting. And it so happens that the fight has been lead, and the greatest responsibility by far for our great program has been due to Governor Alfred E. Smith. (Applause.) He has won that fight in spite of the leadership of the Republican Party, and none of us in this campaign is taking issue with the rank and file of the Republican Party, but we take issue with its leaders. We take issue with the leaders of the Republican Party who put their selfish benefit above the good of the people. We fight those leaders who have no vision, who want things to remain as they are. And, incidentally, I am quite convinced in my own mind that a great part of the opposition by the Republican leaders is due to a lack of imagination, if nothing else. They would have been for these measures if they had happened to think of them first, but they did not; Smith did.

And so, when anything comes up -- and this goes back over many years -- the same story when I was in the Senate, and told the people of the State about it, and

Legislature away back in 1911 it was the same thing. It was Assemblyman Smith, Senator Robert Wagner and a few others of us who were responsible for the initiation of a great program of social welfare. It was a Democratic Party that put through the Workmen's Compensation Law, and what happened? We were called socialists. We put through any number of other measures for which we were branded as socialists - branded by the same Republican leaders that that speech of Mr. Hoover's repeated the day before yesterday - the same Republican leadership, in many cases the same individuals, and I don't have to name those individuals up in this neck of the woods, who are behind the candidacy of Mr. Ottinger.

Everybody knows on this power question quite frankly that Mr. Ottinger's mind runs with the mind of Mr. Machold. It is the same outlook on the subject of power. The two work together. ~~start joint. There was~~

On that famous occasion in 1926 when the people of the State were saved from what I regard as a great theft, simply because the Government of this State caught on to what Mr. Ottinger and the Water Power Commission were about to do, with their pens in their hands, and told the people of the State about it, and

the Water Power Commission and the power companies that were going to get grants did not have the nerve to go through with it. They did not want to fly in the face of the publicly expressed opinion of the people of this State. Railroads - constant wars between the express

Yes, socialism. This water power program of the Democratic Party is socialistic, if you like, but what kind? Let us analyze that word a little further. Have you ever considered the fact that the Post Office system of the United States is socialistic in that sense? Why have we got a Government-run post office instead of a private postal system? Well, for two reasons: We got it, in the first place, because the private system in use down to, as I remember it, about 1805, was not working well. There was no safety - no guarantee that you would get your letters after you had entrusted them to somebody to deliver at some distant point. There was the wrong kind of competition, and the Government stepped in and inaugurated the postal service of the country. Pure socialism; the Government in business. Yes. And you remember the situation about the express and parcel post only a comparatively few years ago. All of us older

people can remember the days when there was no parcel post and we had to depend on express companies -- various express companies who were doing the best they could. There were constant rows between the express companies and the railroads -- constant rows between the express companies and labor, and during the course of my early practice at the bar in New York City I have on various occasions in different years tried a great many cases both for and against the express companies, so I know something about it. What happened? It was an unsatisfactory system and the Government put in the parcel post system. Does anybody today want to give them up and go back to the old means of sending parcels? What is the proof of it? It worked. In other words, we American people are pretty practical. Isn't that the answer? We are willing to have the Government of the United States carry on certain kinds of business for us, if the Government can do it better than anybody else, and that is why I want the Government of this State to develop the power sites of this State, because the Government can do it better than anybody else.

I believe that in this election we are going

to have a very discriminating vote. I think we are then going to have an extremely intelligent vote, and I don't believe that when Mr. Hoover announces in New York that the whole program of Governor Smith as a candidate for the Presidency is a socialistic program, that people in this country with common sense will add with a smile and say to themselves, "Poor Mr. Hoover is getting in a panic." That is the actual fact, my friends. ~~my are~~

We are going on -- and when I say "we", I mean the candidates of the Democratic Party for National and State office -- quietly, simply trying to expound principles, trying not to make any rash promises that we know we can't fulfill, telling the people of the State in very simple terms that we propose here in this State two things: ~~years ago, the State was I went through the~~

First, to carry out during the next two years that magnificent program which Governor Alfred E. Smith has been responsible for in the past six years. ~~how tall~~

Secondly, that we do not propose to stand still. That we recognize that every year that goes by, new ~~new~~ problems are represented -- present themselves to the ~~the~~ people of this State. We do not believe in pushing these

problems aside for later solution. We want to take them up now, so that this State won't either slip back or stand still, and we propose to approach these new problems in the same spirit in which Governor Smith has approached the problems of the past.

We progressives -- and I am quite certain that the people of this State are in overwhelming majority progressives -- I am quite certain that they are not going to listen to outworn arguments. We have heard much of prosperity. Coming through this State first the length of the Southern Tier, and in the past three days along the central part of the State from Buffalo, I have inevitably compared the appearance of the farms of this great section with the appearance which they bore eight years ago, the last time I went through the State, and I want to tell you that, having been brought up on a farm myself, like any farmer I can tell pretty well from the appearance of a man's farm as to how well that man is getting on, as to how well he is prospering. And I have been shocked, coming through the State of New York, at the way the farms of this State have gone backwards in their physical appearance. The only prosperous

people along these state roads of ours are the hot dogs
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Smith. I don't see any superabundance of prosperity
on the farms of the State of New York. I am not saying
that the country isn't prosperous. It is in spots
mighty prosperous, but on the other hand there are a
great many places where that prosperity hasn't struck
home. It is spotty, and one reason is that the people
who have been running this Government of ours have been
thinking in terms of one class. I am not opposed to any
class, but I am quite certain that the policy of Gover-
nor Smith in this State, the policy which he will carry
out in Washington, will concern itself far more with
the average prosperity of the country, and adequate
responsibility for every section of the country, and in
that way, in the final analysis -- I don't care whether
it is in the city or on the farm -- the country as a
whole will have far more prosperity than it has got to-
day.

It is a big issue and I am very confident of
the answer. I know that in the past five elections --
State elections -- Oswego has in every single instance

given a majority to Governor Smith. I am confident this year not that Oswego will give a majority to Governor Smith, but that in voting for him for the Presidency of the United States, you will give him a bigger majority than he has ever had before.

Senator Copeland has spoken to you on a little plan that on the fourth of March next year you good people all hire and take a couple of special trains down to Washington. I am all for your marching up Pennsylvania Avenue on the fourth of March, but an occasion of that kind needs a little practice beforehand, and I want you good people to take it out on me -- I want you to come down to Albany on the first of January. (Prolonged Applause.)

After we dedicate a monument to the memory of the American Sailors of the War of 1812, and it is a curious fact that very few people know that one of the largest ships of the American Navy, a 34-gun, three-decker, was built in 1815 close to this city. And so I probably know a good deal more about the history of these things in Watertown than most people here do.

And I am glad in coming back here to find looking so well, my old friend, Judge Parcell, (Applause) and

Gen. S. Brown *[Loswego]*
SPEECH OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AT ~~68-125~~, N. Y. OCTOBER 24th, 1938

LUNCHEON .

MR. ROOSEVELT: Mr. Chairman and my friends. I am getting a great kick out of this campaign. (laughter) Each day that goes by I think I am entering more and more into the spirit of it.

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As I was driving up this morning I couldn't help thinking back a little during the past 2 months of what this country has been going thru. To my mind it has been the most interesting political campaign thruout the nation that has ever been held in my life time.

Of course, every campaign goes thru certain periods. During July and the first part of August, before the notification speeches, it is called in the newspaper offices the silly season. Everybody is getting off wise cracks. Everybody is laughing. And then they get into a serious period, and every body takes themselves seriously, and that is a time when it is a mighty good thing for the people to have a sense of humor. That question of a sense of humor becomes increasingly important during the last two weeks of the campaign for then the nation graduates from the serious period into the panic season, and a lot of other wise, sane people get seized with panic.

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If Mr. Hoover had spoken truly he wouldn't have used the word Socialism. He would have used the two words, "Social Betterment" because those two words sum up the great achievements of Alfred E. Smith over the period of the past 10 years. (applause)

As another evidence of this being a panic season in certain circles: it is interesting to note that what we used to call in the Navy "contact between the various component parts of the Republican Fleet has been lost." One of the Squadrons is headed off in one direction, another is headed off in another. It is a divided fleet. They are in the

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Oswego - page 4.

He has won that fight in spite of the leadership of the Republican Party, and none of us in this campaign are taking issue with the rank and file of the Republican Party, but we take issue with its leaders. We take issue with the leaders of the Republican Party who put their selfish benefit above the good of the people. We fight those leaders who have no vision who want things to remain as they are. And incidentally, I am quite convinced in my own mind that a great part of the opposition by the Republican leaders is due to a lack of imagination, if nothing else. They would have been for these measures if they had happened to think of them first; but they did not. Smith did.

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Yes, socialism. This water power program of the Democratic Party is socialistic, if you like, but what kind? Let us analyze that word a little further. Have you ever considered the fact that the Post Office system of the United States is socialistic in that sense? Why have we got a government-run post office instead of a private postal system? Well, for two reasons: We got it, in the first place, because the private system was ~~run~~ down to, as I remember it, about 1806, was not working well. There was no safety -- no guarantee that you would get your mail.

Insert

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I believe that in this election we are going to have a very discriminating vote. I think we are going to have an extremely intelligent vote, and I ~~don't~~ believe that when Mr. Hoover announces in New York that the whole program of Governor Smith as a candidate for the Presidency is a socialistic program, that people in this country with common sense will ~~see~~ *smile* and say to themselves, "Poor Mr. Hoover is getting in a panic." ~~It is the actual fact, my friends.~~ *It's a bad description. 11/11/14*

We are going on -- and when I say "we", I mean the candidates of the Democratic Party for National and State Office -- quietly, simply trying to expound principles, trying not to make any rash promises that we know we can't fulfill, telling the people of the State in very simple terms that we propose here in this State two things:

First, to carry out during the next two years that magnificent program which Governor Alfred E. Smith has been responsible for in the past six years.

Secondly, that we do not propose to stand still. That we recognize that every year that goes by, new problems are presented - present themselves to the people of this State. We do not believe

in pushing these problems aside for ~~later~~ solution. We went to take them up now, so that this State won't either slip back or stand still, and we propose to approach these new problems in the spirit in which Governor Smith has approached the problems of the past.

*by the next generation
not fair*

*"I see
Trade"
I see*

We progressives -- and I am quite certain that the people of this State are in overwhelming majority progressives -- I am quite certain that they are not going to listen to outworn arguments. We have heard much of prosperity. Coming through this State first the length of the southern tier, and in the past three days along the central part of the State from Buffalo, I have inevitably compared the appearance of the farms of this great section with the appearance which they bore eight years ago, the last time I went through the State, and I want to tell you that, having been brought up on a farm myself, like any farmer I can tell pretty well from the appearance of a man's farm as to how well that man is getting on, as to how well he is prospering. And I have been shocked, coming through the State of New York, at the way the farms of this State have gone backwards in their physical appearance. The only prosperous people along these state roads of ours are the hot dog artists.

I don't see any superabundance of prosperity on the farms of the State of New York. I am not saying that the country isn't prosperous. It is in spots mighty prosperous, but on the other hand there are a great many places where that prosperity hasn't struck home. It is spotty, and one reason is that the people who have been running this Government of ours have been thinking in terms of one class. I am not opposed to any class, but I am quite certain that the policy of Governor Smith in this State, the policy which he will carry out in Washington, will concern itself far more with the average prosperity of the country, and adequate responsibility for every section of the country, and in that way, in the final analysis -- I don't care whether it is in the city or on the farm -- the country as a whole will have far more prosperity than it has got today.

It is a big issue and I am very confident of the answer. I know that in the past five elections - State elections - Oswego has in every single instance given a majority to Governor Smith. I am confident this year not that Oswego will give a majority to Governor Smith, but that in voting for him for the Presidency of the United States, you will give him a bigger majority than he has ever had before.

*Down the Timpedors
Full speed ahead*

~~XXXX~~

I want to elaborate a little further on the whole subject of business functions undertaken by the national Government or by any State Government. I want to make it clear that I am opposed to having any Government conduct any business function which can be better or equally well handled by private organizations of individual citizens. That is, and should be a great fundamental principle subscribed to thruout the country. But on the other hand, I conceive it to be a great~~er~~ error to assume without study or thought that because we subscribe to that principle we are precluded from the consideration of certain forms of business which the national Government or a State Government or a local Government could conduct better than any organization of private citizens.

I have already sited the example of the Postal system of the United States. The Post Office Department came into being ~~xxxxxx~~ well over one hundred years ago because of the generally unsatisfactory system of private handling of the mails. I have never met anybody who would recommend restoring the carrying of the mails to private corporations.

In exactly the same way it is not so long ago since the Government went into the Parcel Post business. The reason was the same as the reason for going into the business of carrying letters, and today there is nobody who would advocate the abandonment of the Parcel Post business by the Government of the U.S.

There is without any question a comparatively limited field in which Government as a general proposition has a right to consider functioning in a business way. For instance, 50 years

ago practically all the water works for the supply of cities were privately owned. The whole trend during the past 50 years has been away from private ownership, with the result today that with very rare exceptions the water supply of the cities of the United States is owned by the municipalities, and has become a government function. Again, no one is advocating the restoration of our water supply systems through private ownership.

The city of Watertown represents an excellent example of the further extension of exactly the same principle. The city found itself the owner of a valuable water power. Originally it used this power for the purpose of pumping water, but during the past ten years has developed it and put in generators. About a year ago the city began to use the plant for the purpose of lighting its streets. The question came up as to whether the city would sell the whole of the power developed ~~at~~ at the plant not used for pumping purposes ~~and~~ the Northern New York Utilities Company offered the city \$80,000 a year for this power. I understand that the city would have had to pay back to the Utilities Company \$70,000 as the cost of lighting the streets, leaving the city only about \$10,000 net for the excess power. The question was presented to the ~~citizens~~ ^{Council} of whether the city would light its own streets and sell the excess power. The result was the approval of this plan ^{Council + approval of a Board of 15 men by popular vote} by the ~~citizens by a large majority~~, and I am told that at the present time the power generated at the city plant is worth about \$193,000, which sum is made up from the saving to the city on lighting the streets, plus the amount of money which it receives for the sale of excess power to a private distributing company.

This is an excellent example of the use of common sense and good business applied to the water power problem. It proves that while it is right to have a general rule in regard to keeping the Government out of business, there are business which the Government can handle more cheaply and effectively than private corporations.

During the past few years another line of thought has developed in regard to the construction of public improvements -- I refer to the building of bridges on main~~ly~~ highway arteries. This question came to a focus through the building of the famous Bear Mountain bridge across the Hudson River, under a charter from the legislature to a private company. Under the terms of this charter, this company was to raise the money and was given the right to charge a maximum toll. At the end of thirty years, the bridge was to become the possession of the State. The bridge was completed and has proven financially a tremendous success. It is paying for itself in a period far less than the thirty years provided, and this means that the substantial additional profits will come ~~instead~~ not to the people of the State, but to the stockholders of the original enterprise.

Since then the State has realized the equally great success of the New York Port Authority -- a quasi-public corporation, with no stockholders but with the authority to issue tax exempt bonds. This Port Authority on its present undertakings of tunnels and bridges is doing so well that the original outlay for each of

these projects will pay for themselves in a period far shorter than thirty years, and the profits will revert either to the people of the State or will be accumulated to finance additional projects, or to reduce tolls.

The same principle of the Port Authority can well be applied to many other public works, such as the Freeport-Jones Beach Causeway on Long Island, and the Lake Champlain-New York-Vermont Bridge.

I believe that the same principle already carried out in the above projects should be applied to the proposed bridge from near Watertown over the St. Lawrence River to Canada. When a private bridge corporation was proposed by the legislature to build a bridge at this point, Governor Smith well stated in his veto message: "I think the time is passed when the State should incorporate companies of this kind. Such bridges should be build either from public funds or through an agency such as the Port Authority of New York. Experience with private bridges is that they result in large profits to stockholders and other parties, and the maintenance of high tolls. * * * Private bridges of this kind bring with them approach and traffic problems which in the end fall on the State."

I want to see a bridge build over the St. Lawrence River at ^{Dam} ~~this~~ point, and I hope that this ^{northern} part of the State will unite on a plan for the creation of an authority to carry it out. The only difference between this and the previous authorities I have

mentioned is that one of the former connects the State of New York with the State of New Jersey; the other connects the State of New York with the State of Vermont, and an authority ^{on the} ~~at this~~ *of Lawrence Ottinger* ~~State~~ would connect the State of New York with Canada.

In regard to the broad proposition of the development of State-owned water power sites, I am interested in reading today's editorial in the Watertown Times. You people here ought to know better than anybody else where Mr. Ottinger stands on water power, and your local paper states flatly: "Mr. Ottinger was one of the so-called water power group in this State, and the fact that he is a Republican candidate for Governor does not change his relationship in this regard. He belongs to the group that fought the city of Watertown so vigorously in its attempts to turn its water power to its own use.

I do not think that there is any real question in anybody's mind, as to where Mr. Ottinger lines up on the power question. We have dragged that out into the open, and the people of this State know, in spite of Mr. Ottinger's talk about investigation commissions, that he is, as a matter of principle, on the side of Mr. Machold and the electric utilities companies."