
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Watertown, NY - Campaign Speech

to renew again WATERTOWN - OLYMPIC THEATRE people here
 who have fought on Wednesday Evening past battles
 (laughter). This October 24, 1928, at this section of
 the State - the old line Democrats have always been

 ready to fight and bleed, and they have done a good deal

Judge Purcell and my friends in Watertown.

I always like to come back here because, you know, some
 of you, that my first love, and I think probably my last
 love, is the Navy. pleasant, because in the last analysis

Now, you don't understand that, do you? And
 yet, close up here there is still in existence a United
 States Navy Yard over in Sacketts Harbor, and I think
 the first time I ever came to Watertown was to come to
 Sacketts Harbor to 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 74-man, three-mast
 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 look-
 ing so well, my old friend, Judge Purcell, (Applause) and

to renew acquaintance with a lot of other people here who have fought and bled with me in past battles going (Laughter). There is one thing about this section of the State - the old line Democrats have always been ready to fight and bleed, and they have done a good deal of bleeding, too; but I notice that they are still Democrats.

I am glad that Mr. Brown said what he did in regard to the Republicans, because in the last analysis this campaign is not going to be decided just on party lines. When you come right down to it, the independent switching vote that goes first to one side and then to the other, depending on the issues of the candidates, holds the balance of power in the State of New York, and it is a mighty good thing that it does. More power to the independent. That is particularly true, I think, this year; true all over the country; especially true because the people all over the country are taking more interest this year in the Presidential election than in any year in my memory since possibly 1896, when the Democratic Party went after the false god of free silver -- which we recognize now to have been a false

god. This year we haven't got any false gods. We have got a leader whom the people of this country are going to make President next March. (Applause.)

Every campaign goes through various periods: the silly season back in July; then people get more serious in August; more active in September, and the first part of October, and then just about this time of every national campaign we enter into the panic period. It started the day before Yesterday in New York. My old friend Mr. Hoover -- for I knew him well down in Washington -- showed unmistakable signs of panic. Knowing him well, I have anticipated this period. I was quite prepared for it. I was a little surprised that he hadn't blown up last week, but in that speech of his in New York he said a lot of things that no man would say unless he were in a panic.

He went out of the way to analyze the various things that his opponent is standing for this year, and he analyzed them down so far that they got under his skin. Then he said that his opponent on the Democratic Party -- the things he was advocating were socialistic. Just think of it! What a perfectly terrible indictment! each other (Laughter) It is going to be a mighty hard

Well, I want to say to my friend, Mr. Hoover, that if the Governor of this State, as a servant of the city government in New York and as four-times Governor of this State, has been socialistic in his doctrines, then the great majority of citizens of the State of New York are socialistic in their doctrines. (Laughter and Applause.) Nearly all of you are socialists, I am a socialist, most of the people in the United States are socialists.

Of course, that kind of attack on the part of Mr. Hoover does not get anybody anywhere. It is panic; sheer, utter, ten-days-within-election panic, but if Mr. Hoover had been talking the truth he would not have used the word socialism. He would have used two words - two words that are correct. Where socialism is wrong, he should have used the two words "Social Betterment," because that represents the lifelong struggle of Alfred E. Smith (Applause).

And to come back to the use of Navy terms. The Republican fleet is in a bad way. (Laughter) The component parts, the various vessels of that fleet have got into a fog and they have lost contact with each other. (Laughter) It is going to be a mighty hard

thing to re-establish contact in ten days. I don't believe it can be done. Let me give you one example. The flagship called Hoover talked a great deal about the various measures proposed by the Democratic Party and the Democratic candidate, and attacked them on the ground that they were socialistic, that we proposed various public works, that we proposed various public activities on the part of the Government that were socialistic, and the very same night that the Hoover Flagship was saying that, the Supply Ship Ottinger (Laughter), lost in the fog somewhere off the starboard, was sending out signals, - signals along this line: Here was the first that I picked up. Mr. Ottinger said in Rochester, "Herbert Hoover goes one step further." Never mind further than what. "Herbert Hoover says 'I shall undertake to wipe out poverty in this nation.'" (Laughter.) Isn't that grand? (Laughter and Applause.) My friends, when Herbert Hoover wipes out poverty in this nation, I will vote for him. (Applause.) And I am perfectly safe in making that pledge. And then Mr. Ottinger went on and said: "How will Mr. Hoover 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."

Ah! So Mr. Hoover is going to solve the unemployment and the poverty problem by starting great public works all over the United States. She said socialistic?

(Laughter.) Oh, that's all right, and he will say, "I will

Of course, it is all right for my friend, Mr. Ottinger, to talk about what Mr. Hoover is going to do down in Washington, but Mr. Hoover won't have a chance, so it is all right. (Applause.)

There is a picture of the proposed Hoover Government in Washington putting through all sorts of measures for building federal dams, developing federal water power, boulder Dam, Muscle Shoals, etcetera, and up here in the State of New York the proposed Republican Governor of this State -- you notice him building dams with Government money and development government-owned water power sites through the use of State funds? There is the answer to the Republican fleet. They are off in the fog and it will be a long time before they get together. (Applause.)

Governor "That is really, as a matter of fact, the only complaint I have about my friend Mr. Ottinger. He is a very promising young man. (Laughter) He is advocating anything that any citizen in the State wants. All you have to do is to go up to Mr. Ottinger in this campaign and say, "Mr. Ottinger, I want some measure that will abolish flat tires," and he will say, "I will give it to you." (Laughter and Applause.)

And he has got forty-three different varieties of promises in his acceptance speech of specific things that he is going to do when he is Governor. I added them up on a piece of paper coming over here and I figured out that they would cost about \$2,500,000,000. Fine. And then in the next paragraph he says, "If I am elected Governor, I am going to reduce the taxes of this State. I am going to eliminate the Income Tax; I am going to get rid of the tax on farms." How is he going to pay for it? It is one of those slight of hand tricks, I suppose. After all, people who make those promises go down on their knees and pray that the people of the State of New York will forget them. (Laughter.)

No. I am making mighty few promises in this campaign. I don't believe that any candidate for

Governor has any right to go about the State, into this locality and that locality and the other locality and say to the leaders, "What do the people want here?" and then get up on the platform and say, "I understand that your great need in this locality is such a thing; if I am Governor, you shall have it." (Laughter.)

In the final analysis the issues of the campaign depend on a question of principle, not a question of this, that and the other detail. The principle on which my associates on the Democratic State Ticket and I are running is the principle of carrying through the great program begun and at least half established by Alfred E. Smith. There is still much to be done to complete. And the second part of the principle on which we are running is to apply the same reason, the same thought, the same humanity to the new problems that are coming before the State this year and next year. There are a great many of those. We need leadership. We need leadership on the basis of principle, and I want to call your attention to one or two of them very briefly. I want to call your attention, for instance, to the big matter of putting the Government into business. I want

to elaborate a little further on the whole subject of business functions undertaken by the National Government or by a state government, and I want to make it clear at the outset that I am opposed to have any government conduct any business function which can better or equally well be handled by private organizations of individual citizens. That is and should be a great fundamental principle subscribed to throughout the country, but -- and here is where we differ very definitely from Mr. Ottinger; just because we subscribe to that principle, we are not precluded from the consideration of certain kinds of business which the National Government or State Government or Local Government could conduct better than any organization of private citizens.

Let me cite some examples. There is, for instance, the example of the postal system of the United States. The Post Office Department came into being well over one hundred years ago because of the generally unsatisfactory system of private handling of the mail.

I have never met anybody who would recommend restoring the carrying of the mails to private corporations.

Would Mr. Hoover call that socialism?

And in exactly the same way it is not so long ago since the Government went into the parcel post business, and 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 system by the Government of the United States. (Applause.) Would Mr. Hoover call the parcel post system socialism?

And there is without any question a comparatively limited field in which the Government, as a general proposition, has a right to consider functioning in in a business way. For instance, here is another case. Fifty years ago practically every waterworks for the supply of cities was privately owned. The whole trend during the past fifty years has been away from private ownership of waterworks, with the result that today with very rare exceptions the water supply of the cities of the United States is owned by the citizens of those cities and have become government functions. Again, no one is advocating the restoration of our water supply systems to private ownership. Does Mr. Hoover

call that socialism? the power generated at the city

I understand that 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 the plant, that is to say, the part not being used for pumping purpose, and I understand that my old friend, John Carlisle, offered the city \$80,000 a year for this power. I understand, though, that the city would have had to pay back to the utilities company \$70,000 a year as the cost of lighting the streets, leaving the city only about \$10,000 net for the excess power. And I am told that the question was presented to the Council, whether the city would light its own streets and sell the excess power, with the result that the plan was approved by the Council. A bond issue was approved by the voters of this city, and I am told that

at the present time the power generated at the city plant is worth over \$190,000 a year, which sum is made up from the saving to the city in lighting the streets, plus the amount of money that it receives from the sale of excess power to a private distributing company.

(Applause.) Am I right on that. (Applause.) Now, if that statement is correct -- and I have tried to check it pretty carefully, and I guess you people know whether it is correct or not -- it is a mighty good example of the use of common sense and business applied to the water power problem. It proves that while it may be right to have a general rule in regard to keep the Government out of business, there are businesses in which the Government -- which the Government can handle more cheaply and more effectively than private corporations. (Applause.)

And 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 highway arteries. The question came up a number of years ago through the building of the famous bridge across the Hudson River at Bear Mountain under a charter

from the Legislature to a private company. Under the terms of the charter the company was to raise the money. It was given the right to charge a maximum toll. At the end of thirty years the bridge was to come into the possession of the State of New York for nothing. It sounded like a mighty good plan, and from what we knew at the time, the Legislature was right in passing the law, and the Governor was right in signing it. 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 not go to the people of the State of New York but to the stockholders of the original enterprise.

Since that time the State has realized the equally great success of the Port Authority in New York, a quasi-public corporation with no stockholders, but with the authority to issue tax-exempt bonds. This Port Authority on its present undertaking 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 will be used to reduce tolls. ^{See a bridge over the St. Lawrence}

Now, the same principle that we have in the case of the Port Authority of New York can well be applied to many other public works, such for instance as the two that have already been undertaken, the Freeport-Jones Beach Causeway on Long Island, and the Lake Champlain-New York-Vermont Bridge. I believe that the same principle that has already been carried out in the above project should be applied to the proposed bridge across the St. Lawrence River into Canada. (Applause.) When a private bridge corporation was proposed by the last session of the Legislature to build a bridge at this point, Governor Smith well stated in a veto message: "I think the time is passed when the State should incorporate companies of this kind. Such bridges should be built either from public funds or through an agency such as the Port Authority. 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," to turn its water power to its own use."

I want to see a bridge over the St. Lawrence River at some point. (Applause) 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 that are already in existence is that in their cases one 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 along the same lines 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 was interested tonight 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. Your local paper states as follows:

"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."

Now, I do not believe there is any 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, in spite of Mr. Ottinger's talk about the investigation commissions, that he is as a matter of principle on the side of Mr. Machold and Mr. Cornell of the Electric Utilities Company.

And so there is an issue. There is a straight out and out issue, the best one we have got in many ways, because Mr. Ottinger and I both admit that we disagree with each other. I can't disagree with him on the other forty-two propositions, because he is just so promising you can't disagree with a man that will promise everything that everybody wants. But I have got him on power, and I am going to stick right to him on power down to five P.M. on November sixth. (Applause.)

In the last analysis, there is a question of whether the people of this State want to continue progress or not. It is ^{not} a question of whether they want to put

into control of the State the Republican Party; no; but the leaders of the Republican Party. And there is all the difference in the world. I trust the rank and file in this State because they think very much along the lines of the Democratic rank and file, but on the question of leadership, that is something different.

Go back over the record of the past few years. Every single measure for progressive reform in this State has been blocked and hindered by the Republican leadership in Albany. They have been trying, as you know, to find something -- looking in every corner throughout the State for something that they could get on Governor Smith. They have been trying to find an issue against Governor Smith that they could run on. And if, instead of wasting all that time looking for something on the cleanest, straightest, most progressive Governor that we have ever had in this State, if, instead of searching, they would use what little imagination they had, they might have found an issue before. They have been beaten because they have been outguessed. It is because on every great public question Smith has found the answer first. years of the administration of

Governor And your vote this November, your vote as thinking citizens -- and there are more thinking citizens going to vote in this election than ever before -- there has been more thinking done on this election -- you are going to realize two things:

First, that whoever you vote for, for the head of the State Ticket - and you ought to vote for the other candidates for state office - it is not a matter of good business to send down as President of the Corporation in Albany a man belonging to one party, and as Vice-President or Lieutenant-Governor, as we call him, a man belonging to a different party, and as Comptroller or Treasurer of the State a man belonging to a different party from the Governor -- and the same thing holds good about the Attorney-Generalship, the lawyer of the State. And so, whoever you vote for for Governor, you ought to vote straight down the line for the same ticket, and that applies to the question of the legislature. We know as a matter of history in this State that we have accomplished more when the legislature has belonged to the same political party as the Governor. And the one simple fact in all these years of the administration of

Governor Smith is that he has got what he has been able to obtain from a legislature of the opposite political faith. How has he got it? He got it in two ways; first, by going to the Legislature and talking things over with them and making them see the common sense of his proposition; and the other way is that if the Governor could not get what he wanted from the Legislature, he has gone before the people of the State of New York and told them in plain English the facts. The people of the State of New York have approved on the record in various ways the proposals of Governor Smith.

Whoever you vote for on the State Ticket, I hope that you will vote the same way when it comes to the question of electing your Assemblymen and your Senators. That makes for responsible government, and you and I have been taught the need of responsible government in this State.

And finally, the issue is one of progress — progress on the one side as against reaction on the other. People are trying to stop the wheels of progress in this State. They are telling you that we must not go so fast. They are telling you that we might strike a

mine, as we used to say in the Navy. And so I believe that when November sixth comes, the State of New York, including Jefferson County -- Jefferson County will go back to Farragut's day and are going to say what Farragut said at the battle of Mobile Bay, when one of his lieutenants went up to him and said, "Admiral, you had better stop; there are torpedoes ahead." Farragut looked at him and he turned to the man at the wheel and said, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."

(Prolonged Applause.)

A slightly interesting campaign because, although I have been through this State many times before -- you know, I am an up-State farmer myself -- I have never yet seen so much interest in a political campaign as we have this year. It is interest on the part of men and women, and even children, and it is a mighty good sign. One of the things that has impressed me is that in every place that we have come to I have been surprised by the number of people who come up and have taken me by the hand and said, "I am a Republican but I am going to vote for you." And the reason that a great many Republicans are going to vote the Democratic ticket this year is because they are putting