
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Schenectady, NY - Campaign Speech

LECTURE IN - SCHENECTADY - VAN CURLER THEATRE

Friday Evening

October 26, 1928.

You know, in every campaign there comes a
 period, generally about a week or ten days before elec-

Mr. Mayor -- I always think of George Lunn as
 Mayor (laughter) -- my friends of Schenectady. I am
 very glad that George Lunn said just what he did in re-
 gard to the Republicans. Not only here, but all over
 the State, because there are two things that are very
 significant to me. One is that during all these years,
 that this State has acquired the habit of voting for
 Alfred E. Smith for Governor. (Applause.) His great
 majorities have been due in large measure to the fine
 support he has had from the thinking Republicans of this
 State. (Applause.)

And in this campaign, as I have travelled all
 over the State now for the past ten days, I find an un-
 usual degree -- more than in any previous campaign I
 have engaged in, and that is a good many Republicans
 coming forward in dyed-in-the-wool, hard-shelled Repub-
 lican towns, coming up to me and saying, "We are be-
 lievers in you."

lievers in a continuation of the progressive government of the State of New York, and that is why we are going to support you." (Applause.)

You know, in every campaign there comes a period, generally about a week or ten days before election, when there is a swing. It is one of those things that is mighty hard to put your finger on in any one case, but there is absolutely no doubt in the mind of any man or woman who has been travelling through this State during the past four or five days, that that swing is actually in progress. We have found it in coming back along the line of the New York Central from Buffalo; we have found it down along the Southern Tier; and we have found it up in the northern district around Watertown.

Several factors enter into that feeling that is in the air. One of them is, no doubt, the fact that my old friend, Mr. Hoover, has for the first time in the campaign, lost his sense of balance. (Laughter and Applause.)

That speech of his in New York City the other day, when he talked about Alfred E. Smith, the Socialist (laughter and applause) -- that did the trick. Al Smith

has been called a Socialist lots of times before, and he knew just what to do (laughter), and he came back and he made the obvious reply, "If I am a Socialist, the great majority of the people of the State of New York are Socialists, and we are proud of it." (Applause.)

Another thing that people have been noting -- one of the other factors in this change, in this swing of the pendulum at the last minute, is the fact that in this State I found the average voter has not been able to make head or tail out of what the gentlemen on the Republican State ticket are campaigning about.

They have done two things; first, they have gone out and have taken credit for all the splendid series of legislative enactments which were originated by Governor Smith; (applause) and secondly, getting into a state of panic a little bit earlier than Mr. Hoover; they have been going around the country dragging out again the old cry, telling the people in this State that unless Mr. Hoover is elected, all the children in the State are going to go bare-footed for the next four years, and none of us will be able to feed our own family. ~~and~~, where they are getting a little confused.

After that Well, of course you people who have gone through national elections in the past remember the same thing. Those of you who are old enough to go back to the days of Cleveland in '84 -- frankly I can't remember that election but I am told that the same old cry was used. Well, we got through four years with Cleveland pretty well, and later on, in '92, the same old cry was used, and although in the second term of Cleveland to be sure, we did have a part in the world-wide depression from 1892 to 1896, still the country managed to survive. We had other depressions under Republicans, too. When Woodrow Wilson became President we were told before-hand that the country was going to the dogs, and it didn't. So this old story does not mean much today. It means a bankruptcy of thought on the part of the Republican leaders.

My fight, your fight, our fight this year is not against the rank and file of the Republican party. Our fight is against a bankrupt leadership on the part of the Republican leaders. (Applause.) And they are getting down to the point in their meetings, these Republicans, where they are getting a little confused.

A few days ago in Utica they held a Republican rally and the speaker of the occasion, telling about all the panics that have happened, or alleged to have happened during Democratic rule, and somebody in the back of the audience said: "Mr. Chairman, how about the 1907 panic?" "Oh," said he, "that was caused by the new tariff bill," (Laughter) which law was passed just seven years later.

Then the gentlemen in the back of the audience said: "But, Mr. speaker, you are wrong on that; Theodore Roosevelt was President in 1907." "No," said the speaker, "It was Benjamin Harrison." (Laughter) That is the kind of American history that is being taught by the average Republican speaker, who takes his alleged facts out of a campaign book.

They are very much along the same line with the conduct of the national campaign this year. You and I who have been listening over the radio or reading the papers know, for instance, that my friend Mr. Hoover - and he is an old friend of mine -- has been campaigning along this line. He has made one major speech perhaps every two weeks. He started to prepare for that speech probably three or four weeks ahead, and he has written

down his own notes, and he has accepted the suggestions of his friends, and gradually a large document, pages and pages of speech, have found their way to the typewriter. And when that was done, it was submitted to a cabinet composed of the best minds of the Republican Party; all of those best minds have sat solemnly upon this voluminous document and have edited it; and then, when they got all through, it has gone back to Mr. Hoover and it has been edited again, and finally another conference was held, and the combined wealth and strength and brains of the Republican Party had been put on that speech, and then it has been printed, and has been printed at least a week or ten days before delivery, and then he read it over carefully and put it in front of a stand in front of the microphone, and then read it to the American public. We people in the State of New York are not accustomed to that kind of speech. We people are accustomed to a different kind of speech, the kind of heart to heart talk, the kind that has come directly from the lips and from the heart of Alfred E. Smith. (Applause.) His speeches represent not the editing of the best brains of the Democratic Party;

they represent a human being. And we are proud to know in this state that he is selling that idea to the American people; that whether it be in the South or the West, or whether the Far West or up in New England, they are taking the man as they find him -- and they are finding him good. (Applause.)

I have said that our fight is not against the Rank and file of the Republican party, either nationally or in this State, and tonight I want to talk some more, just as I have been doing the past ten days, about Republican leadership in this State, the history of the past few years and the things that are going to happen in the next two.

The insincerity of the gentlemen who form the leadership of the Republican Party of this State is the principle reason why hundreds of thousands of Republicans are again voting the Democratic Ticket this year. This colossal insincerity is evidenced both by the Republican platform and by the speeches of the Republican candidates for office.

Unable to make a direct, detailed attack on any portion of Governor Smith's splendid administration

of this State, they have resorted to two methods of campaigning; first, they have tried to take credit, as I have said, for all of the great constructive reforms carried through under the splendid leadership of Governor Smith. (Applause.) But we know something about our own history, whether it be here in the Capitol District or whether it be out on the shores of Lake Erie or Lake Ontario, we are fully aware of whether these reforms were suggested and pushed by Governor Smith or by the Republican leaders. And secondly, the Republican platform has tried to bring up again in a very half-hearted way that outworn charge of extravagance in conducting the affairs of our State Government.

It is obvious that the Republican leaders this year have no faith or heart in this issue, because while they start off in their platform by saying, "We condemn the spirit of waste and extravagance that permeates the present Democratic administration," their campaign has remained strangely silent on this point. There is a reason. ~~laughter~~ But it is interesting to note that during the People will recall the bitter attacks made by a relation of mine four years ago, (Applause) and by

Ogden Mills two years ago. They will remember those campaigns and they will remember the complete collapse of those attacks under the clearcut and simple accountings made by Governor Smith in regard to the expenditure of the taxpayers' money; and I propose after the first of January to continue the same simple kind of accounting to the people of this State that they are accustomed to. (Applause.)

Now, the Republican platform goes on and calls attention to the fact that the public debt of this State was \$173,000,000 in 1919, the first year that Governor Smith came to office; and that today it is \$258,000,000. Let us analyze it. Those figures are correct, strange to say. (Laughter.) First of all, the State has grown greatly during these nine years in three respects; first, in population; secondly, in taxable wealth, and third, in the needs of its citizens. It is unnecessary for me to say anything more about the obvious increase in population. Children continue to arrive in this world. (Laughter) But it is interesting to note that during these nine years the taxable wealth of the State has increased to such a degree that the per capita

portion of the State debt on the basis of the assessed valuation of property in the State, has actually decreased. ~~by of Governor Smith has been primarily de-~~

On June 30, 1919, in the first term of Governor Smith, the net funded State debt represented 1.36% of the assessed valuation of the State. For the last fiscal year ending June 30, 1928, it was 1.02%, or a relative decline of 25%, indicating that the debt is now only three-quarters the size of what it was nine years ago in comparison with the assessed valuation of property.

Those figures sound like Mr. Hoover (laughter), but you don't need an adding machine to get that through your head. Those figures are very simple, and it is a pretty fine showing in a period that has been marked by the greatest number and size of public improvements ever recorded in our history. (Applause.) I will not go into detail in regard to these public improvements because you are all familiar with the fact that never before have we accomplished so much in the building of highways, the erection of schools, the enlargement of and addition to our hospitals and prisons, the building

of bridges, the erection of rent-saving state-owned office buildings, and so on down the long list for which the policy of Governor Smith has been primarily responsible. (Applause.) everything else, the kind of

Now, taking up for one moment the reorganization of the administration of the State Government itself. Tomorrow night, tonight and tomorrow night are my last nights up-State. I come, as you know, from up-State myself, and I want to talk very briefly tonight about a problem which is primarily an upstate problem. Next week I will be, most of the time, in New York City, and before I leave the Hudson River Valley and the Mohawk River Valley, I want to bring up a question which I brought up in my speech of acceptance in New York two weeks ago. I have shown in previous speeches that the Republican platform and the Republican leaders in this State have spent their time in trying to block, hamper and destroy the business efficiency of this great constructive reorganization. It was fought for by the Governor, backed up by the common-sense businessmen of this State, and also by those citizens in every walk of life who are ready to put good business judgment as a guide. The responsibility of the Governor is recognized

ahead of partisan politics. He has formed through his re-

organization. We had in those old days, as you know, one hundred and eighty different departments, bureaus, boards, commissions and everything else, the kind of boards that General Leonard Wood used to refer to in the old days as being "long, narrow and wooden." Each of these one hundred and eighty constituted a little principality in itself, and in the old days in Albany I can remember the chairman of this Commission, the President of that Board, strutting around as if he were the Secretary of State of the United States. The heads of most of these principalities were responsible to nobody. There was overlapping of work, competition where there should have been cooperation, each one making out his own reports, different scales of salary, jealousies, log-rolling, favoritism.

Today what do we find in Albany? I can tell you I am mighty glad of the prospect of going to Albany after the reorganization and not before. (Applause.)

Through the leadership of Governor Smith we have in place of these one hundred and eighty principalities only eighteen departments in Albany, one-tenth as many. The responsibility of the Governor is recognized

at last, and as you know, he has formed through his re-organization, a responsible cabinet which sits with him in the discussion of all the business affairs and policies of the State. ~~only a well-balanced budget, but an~~

As an example of the old system, I remember that there used to be, for instance, 13 historic mansions and headquarters, each operating under its own commission, quite a number of them around this part of the State -- thirteen battlefield reservations, each operating under its own commission, and eight small park areas each under its own separate commission. Today all of these thirty-four uncoordinated organizations are responsible to the Conservation Commissioner, to the State Council of Parks, and the Commissioner himself is responsible to the Governor. That is a pretty good practical example of what has been done. ~~the same system~~

Finally, we have in effect this year for the first time, the executive budget, another example of reform fought for by Governor Smith and finally grudgingly assented to by the Republican leaders. The real reason for the legislative opposition is this: This Executive Budget drags out into the open all of the former log-

rolling, petty schemes for local projects of individual Republican leaders. However, how the Executive Budget imposes on the Governor in the first instance the duty of preparing not only a well-balanced budget, but an appropriation bill. This is another fine example of carrying out that idea of executive responsibility, and it is no wonder that the old line Republican leaders have squirmed at the thought. ~~and today in several~~

And this is a good time to say something in regard to that next step that I have spoken of; in my acceptance speech I referred to the need of studying the possibility of making more improvements in the administration of our counties and towns. We are living today, so far as county and town government is concerned, under the laws promulgated by the Duke of York in the year 1676. Just think of that, the same system practically without change! It is, of course, a simple fact that the real tax charge against the farm lands in the State of New York is based on the cost of local town and county government, and I cite the simple example that in many counties in this State which have had practically no increase in population during the last fifty years,

the cost of county government has gone up from five to ten-fold. By the same token there are many towns in up-State New York that actually have a smaller population than they had fifty years ago, and yet in those same towns they are spending from five to ten times as much money on their local government as they did fifty years ago.

Another example: There are today in several places in this State, town supervisors out of an antiquated fee system, who are receiving each year as personal pay, more than the salary of the Governor of the State of New York himself. Yes, from the dollars and cents point of view I ought to be running for Supervisor and not for Governor. (Applause.)

Boiled down, the situation is this: I am not making any specific recommendation on this subject as to how to reform town and county government, because, frankly, it is a subject which has not yet had enough study on the part of the counties and towns of up-State New York. I am confident, however, that everybody will agree with me when I say that very great improvements can be made. I am not advocating the abolition of the

supervisor system, but I am advocating a careful examination of existing wasteful practice. We need two kinds of examination; first, a broad general examination covering the whole State; and secondly, local examinations covering the separate counties and towns. This does not involve the abandonment of the principle of home rule which the Democratic Party is the father of. (Applause.)

I am certain, however, that outside of the Republican leaders, there will be a general willingness to cooperate along these lines in every county in the State. No, I don't expect, in looking into this serious matter, in looking into a matter that may mean the saving of literally millions of dollars of the taxpayers of this state, I don't expect to get any help from Mr. Machold, the Chairman of the Republican State Committee. I don't expect to get any help from my friend, Charlie Hilles. I don't expect to get any help from Mr. Hill, the Hoover manager of this State, and I don't expect to get any help from Senator Knight or Senator Hewitt, or Speaker McGinnes, or Assemblyman Hutchison -- that is not where I am going for help. I am going for

help, as Governor Smith has gone time and again, back to the people of the State of New York. Furthermore, while I know it will be difficult for some people to swallow, I deeply hope that this proposed study can be made along non-partisan lines. It is silly to drag national party questions into the wholly different problem of town administration, and it is equally silly to bring in broad state-wide questions into town or county problems. Yes, it is high time for us to get away from the confusion of issues, and I shall welcome a system, or suggestions from men and women of both parties so long as they are made in the spirit of seeking no party advantage one way or the other. (Applause.) I hope that every voter in this State will give consideration to this and ask himself or herself whether their own local town and county system is satisfactory, or whether it can be improved upon. I seek only improvement for the advancement of good business in the lower units of our governmental system.

One word more. I agree with my distinguished opponent, Mr. Ottinger, that the whole tax system of the State should be revised. This has been advocated.

as is going to do, which I figured out would cost about

It is nothing new. It has been advocated by Governor ~~and~~ Smith for a long time, and I heartily concur, but I ~~ery-~~ want to call Mr. Ottinger's attention to the simple business fact that it is useless to talk about revision of the tax system until we go deeper down, all the way to the expenditures of our town and county governments. The two problems march hand in hand and should be studied in connection with each other. I am afraid that the campaign that Mr. Ottinger is making is proving very helpful to me. (Laughter.)

He has been going around this State promising things - promising most anything. I think that before he gets through, in addition to the fifty-seven varieties of promises that he has made already, he is going to come out and favor free lunches, and he is going to come out in favor of the abolishment by the State of flat tires. (Applause.)

Now, a careful reading of his speeches shows that he is conducting the most promiscuous kind of promising, without apparently giving any thought as to what these promises would cost to carry out. At the same time that he is talking about various things that he is going to do, which I figured out would cost about

two and one-half billions of dollars -- at the same time he is going around saying, "I am going to reduce everybody's taxes." Somehow these two major varieties of promises, of spending money ad lib., as they say, spending it all over the State, anywhere that anybody wants it spent, anywhere to pick up a vote, with that he is talking about no more taxes.

Well, it is part of the same confusion that seems to have come to some of the Republican leaders who are campaigning all over the United States. Mr. Ottinger the other day, instead of talking about State issues, switched, as apparently he is switching in the latter days of the campaign, in some vague hope of riding into office on the coat tails of Mr. Hoover. (Laughter.) He switched to national questions and he told the people about the great things that Mr. Hoover was going to accomplish, and he said to the people out there in Rochester, "If Mr. Hoover is elected, the first thing he is going to do, he is going to abolish poverty." (Laughter.) Well, as I said before, when Mr. Hoover abolishes poverty, I will vote for him, and that is a perfectly safe pledge.

the Feder. And then Mr. Ottinger went on and told how he was going to abolish poverty. He told about how Mr. Hoover, when he became President, was going to start all these great public works, building Boulder Dam. Well, Boulder Dam, I suppose, Mr. Hoover thinks is about five hundred miles long and about four miles high, and that they would employ on the erection of Boulder Dam all of the four million Americans who are now out of employment in these United States. (Applause.) But anybody who knows that Arizona country knows that Boulder Dam would be a highly technical engineering feat, the building of a steel and concrete structure across the canyon, the narrow canyon of the Colorado River, that the people employed on it would be mostly high-salaried engineers. (Laughter.)

However, it is just part and parcel of this promising campaign. But I call attention to Mr. Ottinger's lack of -- I won't say sincerity -- but his lack of cohesion. He talks on the one hand in this State about how he is opposed to my principle of developing the water power sites of the State by the State, and then he goes over and says that Mr. Hoover, as part of

the Federal Government, is going to develop Muscle Shoals and Boulder Dam under the Federal Government. Now, somehow the things don't hang together.

Once more the issue in this State is, on the one hand, a reversion to the unscientific, unbusiness-like, happy-go-lucky log-rolling, you-scratch-my-back and I-will-scratch-yours kind of legislation that we have had under the present leadership of the Republican Party in this State; and on the other hand whether you want a continuation and enlargement of the splendid business policy of Governor Smith (Applause.) We have many new problems to solve, and I want them solved in the line of good business and common sense, not by demagogues and self-seeking partisan leaders. (Applause.)

And I notice as part of the panic you hear of in the Republican campaign, which it has been drifting into in the last few days, and which I can assure you is going to get worse in the next ten days as part of this panic period -- yesterday my friend Mr. Ottinger talked in New York and said that I had claimed the need of a plurality of from five to six hundred thousand votes in the City of New York to win. Well, now, let us

see what I did say. -- What I said was the obvious fact, on that if I got, as I expect to get, five or six hundred thousand plurality in Greater New York, my total majority in this State will be just about that same figure. (Applause.) That ought to hold Mr. Ottinger until after election. (Applause.)

No, I am not in the least bit worried about the outcome of this campaign. Things have taken that definite trend. I am convinced in my own mind not only of the success of the State Ticket in New York, but of the far greater success -- we are going to elect Alfred E. Smith to the Presidency of the United States. (Applause.)

If you have been around this country as I have, especially in my own State of New York during the past ten days, you would feel very certain that there is no question about our Governor carrying his own State. And furthermore, that same spirit that we have got in the State of New York has spread to the other parts of the country. You have read about his reception in Boston, in Providence, in other parts of New England; you have read about his reception in Chicago, in Kansas City, in that was subsequent to the kind of approval that I have

St. Louis, in Denver; you have read about his reception in Louisville and down in Chattanooga, and you are going to read about his reception tomorrow night, I think it is, in Philadelphia. ship: send the kind that will co-

And when Republican politicians get panicky about Pennsylvania, then you needn't worry about the outcome. and so, my friends, I have to go over to Troy.

But when I go to Albany, I want two things: I want you good people to give me down there a Vice-President, an Attorney and a Treasurer who talk the same language that I do. (Laughter.) In other words, I want Lieutenant-Governor Lehman and Comptroller Tremaine and Attorney General Conway. You don't invest your money in any corporation where the president of the corporation has a different policy from the other officers, and by the same token I hope for my own peace of mind, for my own comfort during the next two years, that you will also send down to Albany a legislature that talks the same language. (Applause.)

I know and you know the great difficulties that Governor Smith has had to surmount. You know the struggle that he has had for years against a legislature that was subservient to the kind of control that I have

been speaking about all over this State. If you have to send Republican Assemblymen and Senators to Albany, for Heaven's sake send the kind that will keep away from their present leadership; send the kind that will co-operate, without regard to party advantage, with me for the best interests of the State of New York. (Applause.)

And so, my friends, I have to go over to Troy. I am glad to be back in the Capitol District, and I want to extend to you a very hearty invitation -- I hope that I shall see as many of you as possible on the first of January next in Albany. (Prolonged Applause.)

Two last-three weeks. I understand that after the Roundtable Convention took the action that it did, there was a good deal of what might be called soap-stuff about the Republican editorial writers in the State of New York. They said, "Isn't it too bad that that unfortunate man has had to be drafted for the Governorship? (Laughter.) Isn't it too bad that his health won't stand it?"

Well, we started off nearly two weeks ago from the City of New York -- a caravan -- a whole flock of people, candidates, the press, the stenographic force, etc., and so we started in in Orange County and we went