
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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At Luncheon of United Neighborhood Houses, Pennsylvania Hotel,
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*Discusses Manner of Defeating Bills in Legislative Committees and Attitude
of Majority Party Leaders to Proposed Old Age Pension Commission*

I am particularly happy of the opportunity to speak to an audience of this character at this time, because I want to say something to you on some matters very close to my heart some problems which are now under discussion at Albany. They are subjects of particular interest to you who are striving to make the world a better place to live in for all of us.

I believe the development of a social consciousness is the highest mark of this civilization of ours. All our advancement along scientific and mechanical lines, our progress in material things, can lead to nothing of a lasting nature unless our social foundations are secure. We have made some progress in this direction, but there is a very great deal still to be done.

This winter at Albany we socially-minded people have been carrying on the fight and it is about some aspects of that battle in which we are all so interested that I want to talk to you today. We have covered much ground in past years, but there is still much on our program of progressive legislation yet to be secured. There is no lack of laws, but the difficulty is to get good laws. Our legislatures in the various states meet at regular periods and pass reams of bills, but under the antiquated procedure which is followed in this and other states it is difficult to get proper consideration for the really worth-while things.

We have had, or I should say, are now having at Albany, a good example of the thing I mean. Measures which are in no sense political are being murdered in committee rooms without full and fair consideration and without a record vote. When your senators and assemblymen come up for reelection you will have great difficulty finding out how they stood on any of these measures.

Now most of this legislation was promised in the platforms of both major parties. There was nothing particularly new about any of the proposals. They have been advocated by your organization and like organizations for many years, yet we make little headway in any one year.

I am not opposed to the legislative committee as an institution, but I hold that bills of this character which cannot possibly be dismissed as being partisan or suggested for political advantage should be given a fair, open discussion on the floor of each house and record votes taken on each measure. Then, if we are beaten we cannot say we did not at least have a chance.

In my messages to the people and the Legislature on January 1, I referred to some of these proposals and I have referred to them again in various messages to the Legislature since. I started out to see if we couldn't do something for the farmers of the State and to see if we couldn't get legislation to improve the condition of the industrial worker. Likewise upon a subject, which is a pet of mine, I wanted to make a start toward a better program, one to insure the care of dependent aged.

So far most of the bills covering these recommendations, some of them introduced by Republicans and some by Democrats have failed to see the light of day. They have been smothered in committees and will remain there, unless all of you who are interested succeed in applying enough pressure to the Legislature to get them out on the floor. I have done all that I could, but I can't pass legislation.

I proposed the appointment of a commission of experts to study the problem of old age security against what, one of our most important and most pressing social problems. Well, I am told that the majority party in the Legislature is willing to give me a commission, but that it will be a commission, composed of three members appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, three members by the speaker of the Assembly; and then they are willing to let me appoint three. I'll tell you very frankly now that if that is the kind of a commission they want, I don't want it and I'm going to tell them they can make it a legislative commission, and I hope they will find out a whole lot about the subject, but as soon as the Legislature adjourns

I will see what can be done about getting a real commission of experts together. As Governor, I have a perfect constitutional right to appoint such a commission, but unfortunately I can't appropriate the money such a commission must have to do its work properly.

The importance of the old age problem is indicated by the sharp increase in old age dependency within a very few years. It arises principally from changing industrial conditions. The man of forty-five or fifty is no longer a desirable employee and the man who is older has a pretty difficult time getting a job nowadays, if for any reason he is thrown out of employment.

A recent survey made in New York City developed the fact that one of the largest social agencies in ten years has increased its appropriation for the care of indigent old people outside of institutions 2500 per cent. This does not mean, of course, that there has been that increase in old age dependency, but it is an indication of how serious the problem has become.

It is a subject which should be studied carefully and scientifically and I hope to get together a group of men and women, who having studied the problem, are competent to give us a program for which we can at least strive.