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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**Legislative Correspondents Dinner**

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[March 14, 1938]

GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S  
SPEECH AT BANQUET OF LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENTS

To anyone with a reasonable sense of humor who is not inclined to take himself too seriously, this job of being Governor has its lighter moments. I must confess, however, that making speeches at public banquets does not come under the category of amusing jobs. The man who invented the fiendish custom of ruining your own and the digestion of everybody else in an effort to combine oratory with gastronomy was an enemy of the human race.

There is, however, one such occasion, and only one, in the course of the year to which I look forward with real pleasure and with the assurance of real enjoyment, and that is the Legislative Correspondents' annual banquet. It stands unique among all the varied lunches and dinners to which a Governor is invited. The feeling with which one approaches the usual dinner as compared with my feelings towards attending this merry feast is like the feeling with which one takes off a pair of tight shoes after a hard day's work and slips into a pair of comfortable old slippers. Formalities are forgotten. We meet as friends, and if the shafts of wit are sometimes barbed a trifle, we take it in good part, remembering that "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

There are, I understand, traditions of Governors who looked forward to the morning and afternoon interviews with the press with a feeling of annoyance and others who admitted a positive dread of the occasions; but as for me, I find them the most pleasant hours in the whole day. They are, to me, a chance to forget the troubles and problems that sometimes

arise in a chat with old friends.

I do not know how much you learn from me. There are times when I pick up the paper and find that you have learned things which I did not know myself! But I do know that I always learn something helpful from you. For one thing, you boys are the most accurate and never-failing barometer of what is going on on the third floor that could be devised. When you come in slowly and listlessly with bowed shoulders and dejected mien; when you sit wearily back in your chairs without making any effort to reach for your notebooks, then I know that peace reigns like a river; then I realize that that perfect harmony between the executive and legislative bodies, which I so constantly preach, has been achieved. No one has called anybody else names; no one has issued a fiery statement of defiance; no one has hurled my most cherished measures into the waste basket. There is no news; there is nothing to write about, and you obviously are perfectly convinced that I will not have anything interesting to say either. On such days I yearn to suggest that we all of us quit work and go fishing.

And, on the other hand, when you come prancing down like so many war horses scenting the smell of battle from afar, pencils poised and ready for a real interview, I know that somebody up above has called me a second-story thief at least, and heaven knows what else besides! The eagerness with which you vie with each other to be the first to break the most unpleasant news that you can think of to me is appalling! I sit back, smiling as best I can, waiting for the shock; but these interviews, even under such circumstances, are stimulating, and on those occasions when you are determined to make me tell you something which

I do not want to tell you, the verbal fencing and adroit cross-questioning are a joy to anyone trained in the legal profession as I have been. There are more good trial lawyers on the staffs of our newspapers than on the rolls of the Bar Association!

I am learning to read the symptoms of the facts so expertly as to be able to tell roughly just what has happened when you arrive. When Armitage and *Jarvis* come in with an abstracted and furtive air and watch each other like two vigilant hawks to make sure that one does not slip out ahead of the other, I know that John Henry has arrived from Buffalo and is sitting outside and that each has planned an absolutely exclusive scoop for home consumption.

When George Morris appears wearing the smile of the cat that swallowed the canary, I know that my Republican friends have just scored neatly off my defenseless head; or, to be a little more exact, I know that George thinks they have!

When "Baron" Worn stalks majestically in, clothed in gloom and with knitted brows, I know that he is gravely considering some fundamental problem of state government and is preparing a question which will require the most careful of answers.

Surest sign of all - when George Franklin comes in with his sardonic grin on his face - I know that I have been utterly undone. Nothing cheers you boys up quite so much as to think that your Governor has been put in a hole!

But with it all I feel that it is in a friendly spirit that you come, even when you are bearers of bad news, and I want to express my real appreciation of the frankness and the fairness you have shown

towards me. I have told you many things in confidence - things which would have sometimes made first-page stories - and I want to testify publicly that not once has that confidence been intentionally broken. If all the professions were as scrupulously fair as you gentlemen try to be, most of the ~~legal profession~~ <sup>lawyers</sup> would be in the bread line within a year.

After all, to the great majority of the people in this state, it is not what I say or what I am or what I do but what you gentlemen report that I say or am or do that forms the basis on which they reach their conclusions as to whether I have been a good Governor or a bad Governor. Yours is a heavy responsibility. No matter what your personal views, you must neither flatter nor malign, and may I say that you do your job extraordinarily well.

There are tremendous problems facing us. There is an immense amount of education of the voter still to be accomplished. If it were not for my sincere belief in the willingness and ability of you gentlemen of the press, whether you think I am right or wrong, to at least put my side of these questions fairly and honestly before your readers, I would feel sometimes hopelessly discouraged at the magnitude of the task before me.

Suppose we spend half an hour or so in considering some of these problems ----

*Q. Now: Gov. The gentlemen of the press are outside*  
*Gov. all right I have <sup>CROSS</sup> them in*  
"Beg pardon, Governor, I hate to interrupt you, but there is somebody outside who really must see you right away."

GOVERNOR

"But I am ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> the ~~middle of a~~ <sup>middle of a</sup> ~~man~~ <sup>man</sup>"

*have sent for the press.*

CROSS

"I know it, Governor, but this is a very important matter."

GOVERNOR

"Well, who is it and what is it?"

CROSS

"James G. Johnson has been waiting to see you for almost fifteen minutes, Governor."

GOVERNOR

"Who is James G. Johnson?"

CROSS

"Why, Governor, don't you remember? He is one of the leading men of Calicoon and you promised me you would talk to him about that job of dog catcher that he wants. He will be terribly offended if I keep him waiting any longer."

MAHONEY

"It's long past four o'clock, Governor, and the members of the press have been waiting for an hour."

*But Governor all right - I saw them in the other room, and, really, Johnson is getting quite peeved.*  
*Well, they've got good comfortable armchairs out in the other room, and, really, Johnson is getting quite peeved.*

GOVERNOR

"Look out and see if he's in there yet."

MAHONEY

"No, he is upstairs."

GOVERNOR

"Then of course we can't have our conference until he gets here."

*Gov. What is it?*

MAHONEY

*He* just slipped in the back door, Governor, to tell you *he* got to have fifty more income tax inspectors at once."

GOVERNOR

"What for?"

~~He has~~ ~~MAHONEY~~ Mahoney just found that none of these boys have filed any income tax returns, except Worn and Lindsey and they filed statements that show no incomes. Think of the money the state is losing! ~~I must~~ put all the sleuths ~~in~~ can get on their trail at once! ~~Timothy~~ ~~to~~

GOVERNOR

"Do you mean to say that ~~you~~ ~~want~~ an income tax inspector to look into a newspaperman's income?"

~~MAHONEY~~ Mahoney

"That's the idea, Governor."

GOVERNOR

*Jim* ~~MAHONEY~~, get Dr. Keib on the telephone."

MAHONEY

"Yes, Governor, and what shall I tell him?"

GOVERNOR

"Tell him I am awfully, awfully sorry but I want him to come right up and take old Tom back with him to Matteawan!"

*poor*