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

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 317

1929 March 26

Message to the Legislature

*Reiter Houses
Willard 23 indiv*

FOR RELEASE IN THE AFTERNOON PAPERS OF TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 1929

GUERNSEY T. CROSS
Secretary to the Governor

*deserting photo
Nurses homes*

St Lawrence - 40% over amount

*Rochester 43.5
Saratoga 48
Hudson River 20
Risinghamton 13*

STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY

Middletown 15.5 March 26, 1929

Buffalo 23.8 Iltica 33

It has been customary towards the close of legislative sessions to give serious thought to the financial problems which will meet the next legislature. While the budget and supplements thereto which I have sent to you show a sound financial structure for the fiscal year 1929-1930, the prospects for the budget appropriations a year from now will present new difficulties.

This year's budget starts with an estimated surplus of about thirty-nine million dollars and ends with an estimated surplus of only five million dollars on June 30, 1930.

This means that even if the present administrative expenditures remain the same during the following fiscal year and the same rate of construction of public institutions is maintained a deficit will result.

A deficit can be avoided in one of three ways:

First, the elimination of building of the necessary hospital and similar institutions for the care of the wards of the state; second, the imposing by next year's legislature of a new or additional tax to cover the deficit; third, the approval by this year's legislature and by the people of the state next autumn of a bond issue to care for additional construction.

The first method I am certain is opposed by an almost unanimous opinion throughout the state. It is a simple but unfortunate fact that the numbers of the wards of the state are increasing in approximately the same ratio as the population of the state is increasing. The only possible way of avoiding the building of new hospitals is to limit the population of the state - an obviously absurd proposition. It is not enough to buy more beds; we have to have more buildings to put the beds into. For example, on Ward's Island, the Manhattan State Hospital has nearly 7,000 inmates though its decent and proper capacity is only 4800. The same holds true in all of the other hospitals both in the metropolitan district and in the rest of the state.

The bond issue approved in 1923 has all been expended or pledged and has gone for the following purposes: 13,137 patient or inmate beds and 3,074 employee beds. Of this total, buildings for about 7,000 beds are still under construction.

The other bond issue approved in 1927 can only be spent at the rate of ten million dollars a year and must continue to take care of new prisons, bridges, office buildings, normal schools, state armories and similar absolutely necessary state functions. For the next three years it is practically all pledged for public works already under way which must, of course, be completed.

The Commissioner of Mental Hygiene has today given me figures showing that the state hospitals for the insane are now overcrowded by 10,000 patients. Within the next seven years the natural increase due to the growth of population will give us approximately 27,000 more patients than the present hospital capacity.

There are now under construction accommodations for about 7,000 patients. This means that by 1936 we can expect to have 20,000 more patients than beds.

Hospitals cannot be built in a month or a year. We have a definite situation to face.

One word in regard to the humanitarian features: The State of New York has, in part, since 1846 and fully since 1889 undertaken the care of our unfortunate people who are mentally deficient. The State must give good care and yet conditions are such today that in grossly overcrowded wards many patients are compelled to sleep in beds in dormitories literally side by side, with the only access over the foot of the bed. Under these conditions of overcrowding and irritation, the hospital personnel cannot give the highest service and the patients themselves cannot be guided into better thought channels or behavior patterns.

Dr. Parsons says: "Unquestionably, overcrowding reacts in the direction of a lowered discharge rate and an increased death rate."

We, the people of the State of New York, will be responsible if we let these conditions continue.

It comes down, therefore, to a straight proposition of building more hospitals. We can do this either by increasing taxes or by issuing bonds. Most of us are opposed to an increase in old taxes or an imposition of new taxes - in fact we would like to see some of the existing taxes lowered.

We come, therefore, to the third method, that of the issuing of state bonds for the building of these institutions. It is clear, of course, that the construction will be permanent, i.e., that the buildings will in all probability be useful for the purposes for which they are built for a period of at least seventy-five or a hundred years.

I am very clear in my own mind that it is a question of increasing taxes next year or of submitting the proposal of a bond issue to the voters of the state at the election this autumn. I am in favor of the issuing of bonds as the more sound and least burdensome of the two proposals.

I, therefore, recommend to your Honorable Bodies/ immediate passage of a bill submitting the proposal of a bond issue of fifty million dollars to be used for the construction of state hospital and charitable institutions for the care of the wards of the state.

These bonds will be issued on appropriation by the legislature and I am very certain that the money will be wisely and economically expended and that the state will have reason to be proud of the institutions erected.

(SIGNED) FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT