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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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**File No. 318**

**1929 March 27**

**Message to the Legislature in re Bond Issue**

FOR RELEASE IN THE AFTERNOON PAPERS OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 1929.

GUERNSEY T. CROSS,  
SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNOR.

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STATE OF NEW YORK  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER  
ALBANY

March 27, 1929.

STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT  
IN CONNECTION WITH PROPOSED  
BOND ISSUE

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I have received a resolution unanimously adopted by the board of visitors of the Manhattan State Hospital on Ward's Island, in the East River, New York City. The board opposes the construction of the Tri-Boro Bridge connecting the boroughs of Manhattan, Bronx and Queens unless some provision is made for moving the state hospital for the insane off Ward's Island. The board points out ~~and I am also informed by the Superintendent of this hospital, Dr. Haviland, former President of the State Hospital Commission, and by Dr. Parsons, present head of the Department of Mental Hygiene,~~ that the Manhattan State Hospital is greatly overcrowded and that conditions in this hospital, located on a small island, in old buildings, are very bad.

Ward's Island belongs to the City of New York. It is located in the middle of the East River. It is under lease to the state for hospital purposes. ~~In 1927 by a special act of the Legislature part of the island was returned to the city for a central sewage disposal plant.~~ Part of it is now occupied by the Hell Gate Bridge. It is now proposed to construct the Tri-Boro Bridge over this island, ~~and immediately adjacent to the Hell Gate Bridge,~~ and a bill to turn back to the city, land on Ward's Island for bridge abutments is now on the order of final passage in the Legislature and will shortly be before me for approval.

The Manhattan State Hospital has a census of approximately 7600, of which 6900 are actually resident and 700 on parole. This

institution has a capacity of 4800 so that it is about 45 per cent overcrowded. Anyone with the slightest imagination can picture the conditions in an institution for the insane where so many patients, not to speak of doctors and helpers, constituting a population larger than that of the average village in this state, are crowded on one small island, and being gradually shoved off by a disposal plant and two great bridges. The buildings are very old. They were made fireproof after the disastrous fire of 1923, in which over twenty inmates perished, and which led to the adoption of the hospital bond issue for fifty million dollars in that year. All building changes on this island have been made upon the theory that the state institution will be moved off as soon as possible.

I believe the construction of the Tri-Boro Bridge is a vital necessity to the people of New York City. Traffic conditions between Long Island and the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx have become desperate. The only possible location for this bridge is over Ward's Island. In addition there has been a persistent agitation for many years on the part of all the civic, recreational and welfare groups in New York City to turn Ward's Island back to the city so that all of the island which is not needed for the disposal plant and for the bridges may be used for playground purposes for which the property is ideally suited. The construction of the Tri-Boro Bridge will make it possible for the people in the congested sections on the east side of Manhattan and the Bronx to reach this island by a short walk or drive instead of by boat.

Every circumstance, therefore, points to the desirability of moving the state institution off this island as soon as possible. The difficulty, of course, is to find another place for the inmates. The obvious place to move them is, of course, the new Pilgrim State Hospital on Long Island. This hospital has been planned to accommodate ten thousand patients. It will cost at least thirty-six million dollars to complete. This is on the theory that each new bed will cost about \$3600. At the rate at which we are proceeding to construct this hospital it will not be completed for at least fifteen years. Last year one million seven hundred thousand dollars was appropriated to begin construction. This year I

recommended a minimum of four million dollars and the Legislature cut it to two million five hundred thousand dollars. There is at present a shortage of about eight thousand beds for the insane in the metropolitan section alone. There is also a serious shortage upstate. Every year there is an increase of well over two thousand insane patients in our state hospitals and we must prepare for about this increase annually. If the Pilgrim State Hospital were completed on the first of next January it would be barely large enough to take care of the patients now on Ward's Island and part of the overcrowding in the other metropolitan institutions. It can readily be seen that we shall very shortly have to start another hospital for the insane. In fact the land for this hospital should be acquired in 1930 so that construction can begin in 1931.

In the meantime the early completion of the Pilgrim State Hospital is of the greatest importance. Over thirty million dollars is required for this purpose and it should be available in one lump sum so that the entire contract can be let in the same way that any private hospital would go ahead with construction work of this magnitude. If funds for this purpose were available early in 1930 there is no reason why the entire contract could not be let and the work completed promptly. Part of the plans and specifications for this institution are already completed. Many of the plans are standard and simply involve slight adaptation. Certainly all the plans and specifications can be completed by the first of next January.

A similar need for funds and for the completion of a new institution exists with reference to the House of Refuge for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents on Randall's Island. A special study of this institution made at the direction of Governor Smith and published last fall showed desperate conditions at this institution. Randall's Island is also located in the East River in New York City, just north of Ward's Island. This island also belongs to the city. The institution is maintained by the state but has been managed by an independent self-perpetuating board.

The report of the Director of the Budget to Governor Smith shows that the institutional buildings which occupy the south end of Randall's Island are old, unsanitary and are not fireproof. All sorts of juvenile delinquents are herded together in them. There are no modern facilities for reformation and cure. The cost of repairs is prohibitive especially as these repairs are made to buildings which are now intrinsically worthless. The new Tri-Boro Bridge is planned to pass over this island as well as Ward's Island and the Hell Gate Bridge also passes over Randall's Island. This island will also be ideally suited for recreation purposes when the new bridge is constructed. The difficulty here is the same as the one on Ward's Island, that is to find a place to which to move the inmates of the House of Refuge. Some of them may be moved to the State Agricultural and Industrial School at Industry as recommended in the report to Governor Smith, and in addition a new institution is required. The City of New York has offered a site for one dollar in Orange county which may be suitable for the purpose. The important thing is to have funds available early next year so that building construction can be started in the spring of 1930 on the entire project to abandon the House of Refuge. There is no reason why plans and specifications for new institutional facilities cannot be completed by January first of next year. The cost of these facilities will probably be not less than five million dollars.

Funds are also needed for the immediate completion of the Rockland Hospital for the Insane and for the Wassaic Hospital for the feeble-minded. About seven million dollars is required to complete these institutions which will immediately be filled to capacity.

It will be seen that a large total is required at the beginning of next year for hospitals for the insane and feeble-minded and for the solution of the Randall's Island problem, and that in 1931 work must be commenced on the first units of a new hospital for the insane. Not less than seven million five hundred thousand dollars should be available for this purpose. Therefore, fifty million dollars in all is needed in 1930 and 1931. I do not know of any other way to make this money available promptly than by the submission to the people of another hospital bond issue similar to the

one overwhelmingly approved by them in 1923. It is true that ten million dollars a year is available from the Public Improvements Bond Issues approved by the people by amendment to the Constitution in 1925. This money, however, is required for other purposes such as normal schools, prisons, reformatories and armories, agricultural colleges and other institutions. I believe that public improvement bond issues will also suffice to complete the additional hospital for the insane. I am satisfied that we cannot possibly depend upon these bond issues to meet the immediate problem on Ward's and Randall's Islands, at Rockland and Wassaic, and the problem of providing about seven million five hundred thousand dollars in 1931 for the new hospital for the insane. I am also satisfied that we cannot possibly meet this problem by small annual appropriations out of current revenues. Under this system uneconomical, piecemeal construction only can be attempted, and continued occupancy of Ward's and Randall's Islands and conditions of overcrowding everywhere are perpetuated.

The hospital bond issue of 1923 was submitted to the people of the state by unanimous agreement of the Governor and the Legislature and was practically unopposed. It carried by a three to one majority. I earnestly request the Legislature to join with me in submitting a similar proposition to the people of the state next fall so that the great East River bridge program in New York City may go ahead without further complicating our institutional problem, so that the islands in the East River may be turned back to the city for recreational use by the great masses of people who live only a stone's throw away from them, and so that the helpless inmates of these state institutions as well as of other institutions for the insane and feeble-minded may receive care and treatment which will insure a fair opportunity to restore them to health and public usefulness.

This situation has been discussed with members of the Legislature for the past month, and it is strictly a question of deciding between a bond issue to be started on its way at this

time, or a new tax or increase of old taxes by next year's Legislature. I am explaining this simple need to the people of the state by radio tonight, as it affects their pocketbooks and also the great moral obligation which we owe to the unfortunate people who are dependent on us.

(signed) FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT