
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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**Albany, NY -
Radio Address re Institutions & Public Works**

READING COPY

RADIO ADDRESS OF GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT UPON COMPLETION OF TOUR
OF INSPECTION OF INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER PUBLIC WORKS OF THE STATE
ALBANY, N. Y. TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1929.

I have not made a general report by radio to the people of the State since last April, after the close of the legislative session. Since then I have spent the greater part of the time in traveling through almost every section of the State, in an effort first of all to get in personal contact with the administration of the state institutions and public works, and secondly to learn at first hand, from the citizens, of the needs and thoughts of the various localities.

I have discovered the joys of touring by canal boat and can understand why a hundred years ago the most popular form of summer vacation was to travel on the canals of the State. In early July, I went all the way from Albany to Buffalo along the Barge Canal and was impressed by the scenic beauties of the whole trip. The Canal, as it is today, is not so much a canal as a very beautiful river with delightful scenery all the way. Later on I traveled by boat from Syracuse to Lake Ontario and then down the St. Lawrence River past Montreal and up through the Canadian Canal into Lake Champlain and back to Albany through our own Barge Canal from Whitehall. I wish that some enterprising

citizens might start a line of passenger boats on at least certain sections of our canals. I am certain that many people would prefer to take a holiday in this way instead of using automobiles.

As far as the business usefulness of the New York State Barge Canal System goes, I am glad to report that the tonnage is constantly increasing -- an average in fact of $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent increase each year for the past five years. The Canal is not used nearly as much as it should be, and I was impressed with one great difference between our canals (which are only used to about one-quarter of their capacity) and the Canadian canals (which are used to the limit of their capacity). This is the fact: the Canadian canals have no fixed overhead bridges, with the result that the regular type of steamer can use them, carrying goods not merely along the line of the canal but also to various ports on the Great Lakes and on the lower St. Lawrence. Our canals have fixed bridges with a clearance of only fifteen feet, with the result that only barges can use them, and these barges are obviously not fitted for lake navigation. I am very confident that the day will come when the State will be confronted with the proposition of either re-designing the Canal System or of abandoning it altogether.

On the whole, I found a very excellent system of administration in the State's institutions. This applies especially to the institutions for the mentally deficient, to the homes for the blind and deaf, to the farms for the care and education of juvenile delinquents, and to the hospitals such as Raybrook

Sanitarium for tuberculosis cases. The physical plants in the institutions are in excellent shape, but there is one outstanding fact in practically all cases -- that is the serious and, in some cases, the dangerous overcrowding. Two factors have brought this about, - the first is the normal but very definite increase in the population of the State, and the second is the fact that we have a far better survey of the population of the State and have brought to light hundreds and thousands of new cases which have existed in out-of-the-way corners for many years, but which need state care. The same condition of overcrowding exists equally in the prisons of the State. *By the way speaking of prisons - I heard a good many of them.*

Here is a problem of overcrowding that vitally affects not only the State as a whole but every community and every individual in the State. We as a sovereign people have undertaken certain definite obligations toward these unfortunate people in our midst who require certain types of care for illnesses, or who must be confined for the protection of society. I am very certain that as everybody today understands this obligation, no sensible person will object to the State caring for its wards in modern, scientific, sanitary and safe ways. This means, of course, in view of the present overcrowding, that the State will have to spend a really large sum of money within the next two or three years in providing more buildings and more facilities of all kinds to take care of the overcrowding.

Most of you remember that last spring I took the position that

The other day in one of our cities a man drove a car up to the curb directly in front of a fire hydrant. The policeman came along pretty soon, walked up and asked the man in the car what he thought he was doing there; didn't he know that he should not park in front of a hydrant. The man in the car replied very quietly - "I don't care."

The policeman replied - "you don't care eh - well just for that I will give you a ticket. The man in the car answered, again quietly, "I don't care." The policeman, getting madder and madder, said - all right young man, if you don't care I will take you to the Magistrate. Again the driver replied - "I don't care." Coming at last before the Judge, the policeman explained the case and the strange attitude of the driver. The Judge looking at him severely said - "young man, this attitude of yours merits the most severe censure. I shall have to fine you \$25." Again the driver remarked placidly - "I don't care. Getting red in the face, the Magistrate pounded the desk and said - All right - that remark of yours is contempt of court and in order to teach you a lesson I am going to add to the fine sixty days in the county jail. With a charming smile the driver replied - "I don't care." Thoroughly aroused by this time the Judge rose and thundered - "Youidiot - do you realize that that is the second time that you have shown contempt for a court and for a judge. Now I am going to teach you a lesson; one that you will remember for a long time. I hereby sentence you to five years in prison. Once more our driver friend looked up serenely at the Judge and said - I don't care - You see Judge it is this way - I am the trusty that drives the warden's care and I am in for life.

buildings for hospitals and prisons, which will run into many millions of dollars to build, should not be paid for out of current state revenue, for two very good reasons. The first is that to do this will mean an increase in state taxes within the next couple of years and the second is that as modern fireproof buildings will last from 75 to 100 years, from a good business point of view this cost should be spread over twenty or thirty years by issuing bonds. For this reason I advocated a bond issue. The legislative leaders in their wisdom opposed this, and since the adjournment I have come to an agreement with them by which they will appropriate about nineteen million dollars at the coming Session for additions to the insane asylums. This will seriously deplete the present surplus in the State Treasury, and as it is obvious that within two or three years we shall have to build still ^{more} ~~further~~ hospitals and prisons, to the tune of sixty or seventy million dollars, a bond issue to carry the load will be highly desirable. As far as anybody can now tell, if we do not have a bond issue we shall have to increase taxes, and to that I am very much opposed.

There are some other things which should be adjusted. For instance, the food which is given to the patients in the hospitals and to the prisoners of the State is, in my judgment, not at all in conformity with modern living conditions or with the best medical advice. Great improvement can and ought to be made in the food which is given to the patients in our hospitals. By the

same token, while no one wants to give Delmonico fare to the prisoners of the State, I am certain that if any of my hearers were to go to a state prison and see what is actually given to the inmates, they would insist on more adequate food better prepared and a better balanced ration. It is worth while remembering that of every hundred prisoners who are now in the jails of the State, well over ninety per cent will presently return to society as free men and women, and it is certainly our duty to see that when they come back to us they are made, as far as is possible, into healthy, useful, law-abiding citizens.

In my travels I found in every section a real interest in the tax problem, especially in its relation to the agricultural communities. I found a clear understanding of the results of the legislation last winter -- that the State has taken over from the towns and counties about seventeen million dollars worth of expenditures which were heretofore paid ^{each year} ~~per~~ by the localities. This, as you know, applies principally to highways and to schools. Recently I sent out a letter to the taxpayers of the various counties, telling them specifically the amount of this saving in each county and bringing home to them the very simple and very definite fact that this saving can only be passed back to the taxpayers in the form of lower tax bills, if the local county and town and village officials decide to do so.

It never occurred to me that my letter could be grotesquely misrepresented as partisan politics. It was merely a fair statement of a fact -- informing the people of the State of a condition, so that if they were sufficiently interested they could find out whether their local officials were or were not going to reduce their tax bills.

To my amazement, some of my political friends on the other side have been trying to bring politics into this matter which ought to be regarded absolutely from a non-partisan point of view. I suppose that there are certain types of minds which can never think of a public question except in terms of party politics. I try not to think of things that way.

It would be sad, if it were not a little amusing, to watch the maneuvers of politicians in trying to get credit for this, that or the other legislative measure. I am amused, for instance, by a letter which was recently sent out by the Republican State Committee Publicity Man, which letter has been used in some of the smaller newspapers of the State and by a number of the county chairmen.

This letter undertook to take me to task on the score that, by inference, in my letter to the taxpayers I was taking credit for the tax reduction legislation, and then it went on to give all the credit to the Republican legislative leaders for passing the legislation. Having disclaimed any desire to take credit for this legislation, let me now tell the whole story instead of just part

of it. Here were the simple facts. In November 1928, just after I was elected and before I was inaugurated, I called together a very representative committee to give me recommendations as to immediate relief measures for the heavily burdened agricultural population. The legislative leaders up to this time had made not a single move, and had shown no interest in farm taxes. At the end of November this Committee, appointed by me, outlined a definite program based primarily on the theory that the State should assume the greater part of the highway and educational burdens, making a fairer distribution of the taxes between the city and the county. This Governor's Advisory Commission was composed of representatives of the Grange, the G.L.F., the Farm Bureau, the College of Agriculture, the Dairymen's League, and other organizations, and their recommendations were put into definite form in the early days of the Session. Let me give credit to the Republican Legislature for going along with these recommendations in almost every particular. The whole program was outlined two months before the Republican legislative leaders took any steps whatever. If any special credit is due, it should go to the Governor's Agricultural Advisory Commission.

By the same token, I am made a little sad by the kind of political arguments which I fear you will have thrown at you a good deal during the next two months, - arguments that are intended to fool the credulous and to misrepresent definite facts in such a way as to be wholly inexcusable. Let me cite one specific example. The same Republican Press Bureau sent out an article

which stated that the Governor failed to put into the record the fact that he vetoed the bill which would have relieved the counties of the cost of building and maintaining bridges on the state and county roads. I was brought up to believe that a half truth is sometimes even worse than a deliberate lie. That is the present case. Everybody knows that by a special message I asked the Legislature to relieve the counties and towns of the cost of building bridges on state and county roads. The Legislature passed a bill declaring that the State would relieve the counties and towns of that cost but by some strange oversight the Legislature failed to include any appropriation of money to carry this legislation into effect. Obviously it was necessary that I should veto that bill. It was a joke. It meant that the State could not pay one red cent toward relieving the towns and counties, as no appropriation had been made. In other words, the bill was an empty gesture.

The Legislature might just as well pass a bill to build new hospitals and prisons without appropriating any money to do the actual building and then go before the people and say, "See what a splendid thing we did." It is absolutely on a par, for political intelligence, with the famous case of the bill passed by the Legislature increasing the salaries of the underpaid school teachers in the State of New York but failing to appropriate any money to pay the salaries. My predecessor vetoed the bill, quite properly, and then a stupid political leader went around the State trying to tell the school teachers that the Governor

was responsible for their not getting increased pay. This kind of political dishonesty will not fool the average voter in this State. Perhaps I have a higher opinion of the intelligence of the average voter than some of my legislative friends have. Of course, at the next session of the Legislature I shall recommend once more the relief of the towns and counties from their share of the cost of building bridges, and I hope that the legislative leaders next year will pass a real bill with real money back of it, instead of handing out an empty political gesture.

I have become more and more impressed with the fact that in most of the counties of the State we are wasting large sums annually through the administering of local government affairs on an antiquated and unbusinesslike basis. However, let me say that 99 out of 100 of our local officials are honest. I make no charges of graft or dishonesty but I do make charges of lack of expert administration, and of our failure to bring our local government in line with modern conditions. The fault lies not with the individual officials but with the system under which they have to work.

This whole subject has been studied for many years. In 1923 a very excellent report was made to the Legislature which pointed out possible savings running into many millions of dollars a year by certain simple methods of reorganizing town and county government. All of these changes could not come about at once, nor should a county or a locality which is satisfied with its present procedure be compelled by law to make drastic changes.

The trouble is that no changes can be made at the present time unless the law itself is changed. I hope that the next Session will pass permissive legislation along fairly broad lines, so that if a county or a locality wants to get rid of unnecessary offices, wants to get rid of duplication of effort, such as in tax collecting and in the maintenance and repair of local town roads, that county or locality can do so. Here again I hope that partisan politics will not enter into the question at all. What we need is action, with the definite recognition of the principle of home rule. That seems to be an American way of going about it and is in line with good business practice. However, I know that most of you are interested and have definite ideas on this subject.

We are approaching a campaign for an election which will cover most of the local officials in the State, the only state officers to be elected being members of Assembly. I am not taking a partisan position. Let this be clearly understood once and for all. I am asking the people of this State to look more and more at the qualifications of the individual candidates. I am asking them to look with care at the record of the present incumbent in office. I am asking them to determine in their own minds which candidate will give to them the most interested, the least partisan and the most practical service. We have many great matters of policy to be determined by the coming Legislature and by local officials. We must look to the need of establishing

forward-looking policies and the need of getting definite action. One thing in particular I hope will be changed during this coming winter in Albany, - that is, that unlike past years all important bills be given full, free and fair debate on the floor of the Assembly and the Senate. We have had altogether too much deciding of the fate of important legislation in small legislative committees. We have had altogether too much strangling of legislation almost before it was born. The new Legislature has an opportunity to do great things for the State. It is very distinctly up to the individual voter to make up his or her mind as to the qualifications of the various candidates. I am confident that we are slowly but surely getting a more intelligent outlook on this whole proposition.

During the next two or three weeks I shall be in Warm Springs taking a holiday, but shall get back early in October to start the long drudgery of preparing the executive budget for next winter. I have had a very delightful summer and have come back from my trips through the State more and more proud of the great beauties, the fine industries and the progressive population which makes up the sovereignty of New York.

Radio Address, Albany, N. Y., September 17, 1929

*Observations of Governor Roosevelt after Completion of Tour of Inspection of
Institutions and Public Works of the State*

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I have not made a general report by radio to the people of the state since last April, after the close of the legislative session. Since then I have spent the greater part of the time in traveling through almost every section of the State in an effort, first of all to get in personal contact with the administration of the state institutions and public works, and secondly to learn at first hand, from the citizens, of the needs and thoughts of the various localities.

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