
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

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1930 January 17

New York City, NY -
State Charities Aid Association

At Dinner of State Charities Aid Association, New York City
January 17, 1930
Public Welfare

The most striking and important difference between the civilization of today and the civilization of yesterday is the universal recognition that the first duty of a State, and by that I mean a government, is to promote the welfare of the citizens of that State. It is no longer sufficient to protect them from invasion, from lawless and criminal acts, from injustice and persecution; but the State must protect them, so far as lies in its power, from disease, from ignorance, from physical injury, and from old age want.

It is difficult for us who live in the present day to realize what a tremendous change this is from the time, comparatively short in the world's history, when the State was the instrument of despots for their own aggrandizement, and the great body of its citizens were mere serfs, chattels, or cannon fodder at the service of their overlords.

We speak lightly of this being the era of Democracy without realizing what a tremendous change has been brought about, or how it has revolutionized the everyday existence of every one of us. In this building up of a theory of government "by the people, for the people" our country has been the leader of the civilized nations of the world; and I think I can proudly add that our State has been the leader in our country. Nor do I think it an exaggeration to attribute our progressive position very largely to intelligent, tireless and systematic efforts, for almost sixty years, of the State Charities Aid Association. For while there has been a constantly growing understanding of this real and most important function of government, legislation, as is always the case, has followed with lagging and hesitant footsteps.

It is easy to say that the State must look after the welfare of its citizens, but to translate that into terms of law and to create additional agencies of government to make such laws effective is not an easy matter, and can be expedited only by the rousing of public attention and the wise direction of public interest on the part of unselfish organizations such as yours.

But while we have made commendable progress toward translating indefinite ideals into definite ideas and again converting these ideas into actual statutes, we have still a long road to travel. I want particularly to stress my belief that the time has now arrived to elevate our State Department of Public Welfare to the position

of importance and independence which it deserves in our State machinery. It has been the Cinderella of our government household. It has been entrusted, haphazardly, with all sorts of odds and ends of things—the household tasks, as it were, of our State establishment—which involve hard work and little glory. Under our new State Constitution it obtained its first real recognition as a separate and individual function of our government, but I believe it should be given far more important duties and far more support and dignity than has yet been accorded it. And I want to ask your powerful aid, not only for myself but for those Governors who will succeed me, and who, I feel sure, will be equally impressed with the importance of its work, in eventually, by carefully considered and not too hasty legislation, raising the Department of Public Welfare more nearly to a level with its proud sister, the Department of Education. This must be done step by step, for as yet we are but laying foundations, and an error in a foundation will eventually bring about the downfall of however perfect a structure is erected on it.

Let me mention briefly some of these matters in which your society has been particularly effective in the past and to which the State must give increasing aid, through our Department of Public Welfare, in the future.

First of all, in your work in connection with neglected or dependent children. You are holding a twentieth anniversary conference of the County Children's Agents representing County Children's Committees of your society. I wonder if the public realizes that forty counties of our State have profited by their intelligent assistance, and on behalf of the State let me gratefully acknowledge the cooperation they have shown with our County Commissioners of Public Welfare, judges of our Children's Courts, and our Board of Child Welfare administering mothers' allowance. There are only four counties where such committees do not exist, and I hope you will soon be able to show a perfect score. The policy of preventing the breaking up of homes and of keeping children under home influence through State assistance, as opposed to the old way of providing institutions for their care after home life had been destroyed, has done more, and will do more, for the good of the people of this State than I think any of us realize.

To your society I look, as well, for unceasing and loyal assistance in my efforts to secure at least a measure of comfort for those who find old age has overtaken them and who have been unable to lay aside, generally without fault of their own,

material provision against that time. As you know, there is a commission working out some practical means of systematically aiding aged and dependent citizens, and I feel sure that their recommendations will be carefully studied by all your members, and; if they are found wise and worthy, will receive your vigorous and wholehearted support.

Then there is another very important matter, and that is our public health. It is becoming increasingly apparent that illness is a thing which can be prevented as well as cured. There is much sound common sense in the traditional Chinese method of paying the doctor for the days you are well instead of for the days that you are sick. Here your society has been and can be particularly helpful because there are limits beyond which, under our theory of home rule, the State cannot go. Much must be done by the counties themselves, and I hope that a centralized system of county health units will become a recognized and necessary part of every county government.

I have left to the last the most pressing and important matter of all--what we now call "Mental Hygiene." Under that head comes the entire tremendous problem of the insane and the mentally defective, a problem already heavy which, I am sorry to say, is increasing under the stress of our swiftly moving modern civilization. Here, as in the case of our criminals, society too long has been content to concern itself with protecting itself. It was not so very long ago that the imprisonment of the criminal and the virtual imprisonment of the insane were considered in much the same light. We have progressed a little more rapidly from that unenlightened viewpoint in the case of the mentally diseased than in the case of the criminal, because here there is obviously no confusing question of moral delinquency involved. We now realize that we must endeavor to cure instead of merely to incarcerate in both instances. But even in the matter of the mentally diseased or defective our facilities for cure are still woefully inadequate. No small part of the large expenditure required by the State this year is made necessary by our past neglect to enlarge these facilities as they must be enlarged from year to year.

The third step, which is something that must be undertaken in each case, is the prevention of both insanity and crime. This has just begun. Money spent for prevention represents many times that amount saved by the State in the future. As a State we have done practically nothing toward the prevention of crime and insanity. It is something I hope we will seriously take up immediately.

In all of these things I desire publicly to acknowledge the splendid work of your organization in the past, and to express my confidence that this work will be as wisely and energetically pursued in the future. On behalf of the people of the State of New York, and on behalf of the Government of the State of New York I thank you.

*Speech of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt
Delivered at a Dinner of the State Charities Aid Association
Jan 17, 1930.*

The most striking and important difference between the civilization^{of} today and the civilization of yesterday is the universal recognition that the first duty of a state, and by that I mean a government, is to promote the welfare of the citizens of that state. It is no longer sufficient to protect them from invasion, from lawless and criminal acts, from injustice and persecution, but the state must protect them, so far as lies in its power, from disease, from ignorance, from physical injury, and from old age want.

It is difficult for us who live in the present day to realize what a tremendous change this is from the time, comparatively short in the world's history, when the state was the instrument of Despots for their own aggrandizement, and the great body of its citizens were mere serfs, chattels or cannon fodder ~~for~~^{at} the service of their overlords.

We speak lightly of this being the era of Democracy without realizing what a tremendous change ~~that~~^{has} brought about, or how it has revolutionized the ^{every-day} existence of every one of us. ~~and~~ In this building up of a theory of government by the people for the people our country has been the leader of the civilized nations of the world, and I think I can proudly add that our state has been the leader in our country. Nor do I think it an exaggeration to attribute our progressive position very largely to intelligent, tireless and systematic efforts, for almost sixty years, of the State Charities Aid Association. For while there has been ~~for many years~~ a constantly growing ^{understanding} ~~realization~~ of this real and most important function of ^{Government} ~~the state~~, legislation, as is always the case, has followed with lagging and hesitant footsteps.

It is easy to say that the state must look after the welfare of its citizens, but to translate that into terms of law and to create additional agencies of government to make such laws effective is not an easy matter, and can only be expedited ^{by} ~~through~~ the rousing of public attention and the wise direction of public interest on the part of unselfish organizations such as yours. ^{But} ~~But~~ while we have made commendable progress toward translating indefinite ideals into definite ideas and again converting these ideas into actual statutes, we have still a long road to travel. ~~and~~ I want particularly tonight to stress my belief that the time has now arrived to elevate our State Department of Public Welfare to the position of importance and independence which it deserves in our state machinery. It has been the Cinderella of our government household. It has been entrusted, haphazardly, with all sorts of odds and ends of things - the household tasks, as it were, of our state establishment - which involve hard work and little glory. Under our new State Constitution it obtained its first real recognition as a separate and individual function of our government, but I believe it should be given far more important duties and far more support and dignity than has yet been accorded it. And I want to ask your powerful aid, not only for myself but for those Governors who will succeed me and who, I feel sure, will be equally impressed with the importance of its work, in eventually, by carefully considered and not too hasty legislation, raising the Department of Public Welfare ^{more nearly} to a level with its proud sister, the Department of Education. This must be done step by step, for as yet we are but laying foundations, and an error in a foundation will eventually bring about the downfall of however perfect a structure is erected on it.

Let me mention briefly some of these matters in which your society has been particularly effective in the past and ^{to} ~~to~~ which the state must give increasing aid through our Department of Public Welfare in the future.

First of all, in your work in connection with neglected or dependent children, ~~you~~ you are holding a twentieth anniversary conference of the County Children's Agents representing County Children's Committees of your society. I wonder if the public realizes that forty counties of our state have profited by their intelligent assistance, and on behalf of the state let me ^{gratefully acknowledge} ~~thank you~~ for the cooperation they have shown with our County Commissioners of Public Welfare, judges of our Children's Courts, and our Board of Child Welfare administering mothers' allowance. There are only ^{you will} ~~no~~ ~~shall~~ soon four counties where such committees do not exist, and I hope ~~to~~ be able to show a perfect score. The policy of preventing the breaking up of homes and of keeping children under home influence through state assistance, as opposed to the old way of providing institutions for their care after home life had been ^{destroyed} ~~broken up~~, has done more, and will do more, for the good of the people of this state than I think any of us realize.

To your society I look, as well, for unceasing and loyal assistance in my efforts to secure at least a measure of comfort for those who find old age has overtaken them and who have been unable to lay aside material provision against that time. As you know, there is a commission working out some practical means of systematically aiding aged and dependent citizens, and I feel sure that their recommendations will be carefully studied by all your members, and, if they are found wise and worthy, will receive your vigorous and wholehearted support.

Then there is another very important matter, and that is our public health. It is becoming increasingly apparent that illness is a thing which can be prevented as well as cured. There is much sound common sense in the traditional Chinese method of paying the doctor for the days that you are well instead of for the days that you are sick. Here your society ^{has been and} can be particularly helpful because there are limits beyond which, under our theory of home rule, the state cannot go. Much must be done by the counties themselves, and I hope that a centralized system of ^{county health units} ~~public welfare under the~~ ~~administration of county commissioners of some kind~~ will become a recognized and necessary part of every county government.

I have left to the last the most pressing and important matter of all - what we now call "Mental Hygiene." Under that head comes the entire tremendous problem of the insane - a problem already heavy which, I am sorry to say, is increasing under the stress of our swiftly moving modern civilization. Here, as in the case of our criminals, society has too long been content to concern itself with protecting itself. ~~and~~ It was not so very long ago that the imprisonment of the criminal and the virtual imprisonment of the insane were considered in much the same light. Possibly because there is obviously no confusing questions of moral delinquency involved in the case of the mentally diseased, we have progressed more rapidly, ^{where the insane are} ~~to the~~ ^{concerned} next step, which is the effort to cure instead of merely to incarcerate ^{of the insane than in that} ~~the insane, then we have~~ in the case of the wrongdoer, but our facilities for cure are still woefully inadequate, and no small part of the large expenditures required by the state this year is made necessary by our neglect to enlarge these facilities, as they must be enlarged from year to year, in times past.

The third step - which is something that must be undertaken in each case - is the prevention of both insanity and crime and has just been begun. Money spent for prevention represents many times the amount saved by the state in the future. As a state we have done practically nothing toward the prevention of crime. It is something I hope we will seriously take up immediately. We are only beginning to do what we ought to do in regard to the prevention of insanity. In all of these things I desire publicly to acknowledge the splendid work of your organization in the past, and to express my confidence that this work will be as wisely and energetically pursued in the future. On behalf of the people of the State of New York, and on behalf of the government of the State of New York, I thank you.

SPEECH OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

DELIVERED AT A SUMMER OF THE STATE CHARITIES AID ASSOCIATION

Friday evening, January 17, 1930.

For release in Saturday morning papers

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