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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. 363**

**1930 February 3**

**Albany, NY - Radio Address -**  
**Present Needs of the State**

Radio Address by Governor on Present Needs of State, Albany  
February 3, 1930

It is nearly three months since I have made a radio report to the people of the State and in the meantime a good many matters of interest have happened. The elections passed off quietly, but I want to call attention to the fact that nothing has yet been done to improve our election laws along lines that have been recommended for a number of years. We still have several communities, one of the important ones being Rochester, where the Boards of Election are not bi-partisan. This, of course, should be remedied. Secondly, we should extend the voting machines to those parts of the State which have not yet installed them. The only argument against it is the cost and in a few years these machines really pay for themselves and save money. If we had machines everywhere, we would end the accusations in regard to withholding election returns in close elections. Finally, we ought to change the law so as to make candidates report their election expenses during the campaign and before Election Day, instead of on November twenty-fifth as at present.

In December another riot broke out at Auburn Prison, but it is only fair to the 1,580 prisoners who were there to make it clear that the actual riot was participated in by only 18 of the prisoners. As a result of this riot and of other riots, not only in the State of New York but in the penitentiaries of other states and in one important federal penitentiary, public attention has been much concerned with the whole problem of criminal laws and physical conditions in prisons. We all know that we are really in an experimental stage in the matter of the criminal laws themselves and modern society is beginning to realize that a prison is intended not only to punish, but is equally intended to reform those who commit offenses and are sentenced. In other words, we are beginning to appreciate that out of every hundred men who go to prison, about ninety-four come back at some future date to live in our communities as free men and neighbors of the rest of us. Nobody wants to mollycoddle the prisoners. In other words, they must recognize that they are being punished for a crime against society, but at the same time we know that it is inhuman to keep them in steel cells built a hundred years ago, cells that are seven feet long, seven feet high and only three and one-half feet wide.

There is no question that one of the most important things for the State to do is to get rid of its antiquated, unsanitary cell blocks and to eliminate the serious

overcrowding which still exists in all the prisons.

To accomplish this, we are planning the immediate construction of additional prison space and, at the same time, to relieve the emergency, we are this month sending out over five hundred men into road camps, these men being short term offenders whose conduct in prison has been excellent. I am confident that there will be cooperation between the Legislature and myself to obtain infinitely better prison conditions for this State.

Since the Legislature met on January first, two very important matters which affect most of the homes of the State, whether they be in cities or in country districts have developed. The first is the offer on the part of the Republican legislative leaders to pass a measure which I hope will prove the first step in the development of the State-owned potential electric power on the St. Lawrence River. The proposed bill authorizes me to appoint a commission of five members who will be charged with the duty of trying to bring in a plan based on the development of this electric power by a State agency or trustees. The bill provides for the setting up of public trustees to carry out the work, if and when a plan is brought in next winter and approved by the next Legislature. The bill also recognizes the principle of selling the electricity when developed by contract rather than allowing it to be distributed by electric light companies under the old system of mere regulation by the Public Service Commission. I hope that this is the first step in obtaining a definite reduction of rates, especially for the householders of this State. The monthly electric light bill in the average home is becoming a more and more important item in the household expenses and it is incumbent on all of us to see that the rates are kept down to the lowest possible level, in order that we may encourage the use in the average family of more and more electric labor-saving devices. We are, for instance, far behind our neighbors in Ontario in the use of household electricity for a multiplicity of purposes.

The other interesting development relates to the proposed increase in rates by the New York Telephone Company. While the action of the Public Service Commission has brought about a reduction of twenty per cent in the proposed increase, the increase itself is primarily due to a decision in a federal court as a result of proceedings in that federal court which lasted seven whole years. I have objected very strenuously to the trial of rate cases such as the telephone case, electric light and gas and subway cases in the federal courts. After all, your telephone and mine are used pri-

marily for local service and our contract with the telephone company relates to local calls. There is no question in my mind that our principal telephone use is wholly a State use and does not come within the intent of the Interstate Commerce Laws. Incidentally, the telephone company like other utilities doing business in the State receives its charter from the State itself, i.e., from the people of the State, and I am making a very strong point with Congress to recognize this and change the Federal Statutes so as to make telephone companies and other utilities present their rate cases to State courts before they go to the Supreme Court of the United States.

This whole subject, however, brings up the further question of what we are going to do in the days to come. In my judgment, the time has come for a complete restudy of the relationship between public utility companies and the State itself. Nobody wants to prevent public utility companies from earning a reasonable return on their actual investment, but we and they must always remember that they are operating under a State grant and must differentiate very sharply between a private corporation and a public utility.

I hope that the Legislature will do something at this session to make possible the simplification of local government along permissive rather than mandatory lines.

A student of our American Government made an interesting remark to me the other day. He said that in his judgment State government in the United States is probably more efficiently run than any other form of government and he suggested that the Federal Government is less efficient because it is so far removed from the people themselves; and by the same token, local government is often very inefficient, because it is too close to the people themselves, and that personality and individuality of people in local government plays too large a part because of friendships and prejudices. The State Government, on the other hand, he considered to be extremely efficient because those who run it are sufficiently close to the people themselves to keep in touch with the needs of the average man and woman, and yet is not too close to have personalities prevent efficiency. That is why I have for over a year stressed the importance in our own State improvement in the machinery of local government.

I have before me a letter from a taxpayer to one of the up-State papers in which the taxpayer complains that the benefits promised by the highway and school legislation of last winter were not reflected in his tax bill. It was with the possibility in mind that the local agencies of government would absorb the very material savings to the

taxpayers resulting from this excellent legislation through increased local expenditures, that I addressed a letter to the taxpayers of each county way back last September, urging the taxpayers to be vigilant and make certain that they would ultimately benefit.

A little later on, I expect to have considerable to say on this subject. Most of the counties have completed the county and town budgets and have fixed tax rates for this year. Almost without exception the budgets which have come to my attention--and that includes a dozen or more counties--have shown either an increase, or else a decrease far less than that warranted by the new State Aid. It is of little use for us in Albany to recommend and pass legislation which has as its object the equalizing of the tax burden in the interest of the heavily taxed rural population, if the local officials of these same counties fail to pass the reduction on to the taxpayer.

I am happy to say that there is at least one county which took full advantage of last year's legislation. The Supervisors of Madison County not only passed on to the taxpayers the full amount of the saving, but in addition reduced county and town budgets as well. As a result, taxpayers of Madison County this year will pay relatively less taxes than almost any other county in the State.

On January 15th, I transmitted to the Legislature the second constitutional Executive Budget. It was my privilege to submit to the Legislature a year ago the first real Executive Budget prepared in accordance with the constitutional amendment which became effective when I assumed office. That budget as finally adopted by the Legislature totalled nearly \$265,000,000. Due to mandatory increases and the necessity for new prison and hospital construction, this year's budget calls for appropriations of slightly more than \$311,000,000, an increase of nearly \$46,500,000 over last year.

This increase does not, however, indicate an increased cost in the operation of the State's many departments. On the contrary, through more efficient administration, we were able to save approximately \$2,000,000 in the cost of running the present activities.

The largest item in the increase is one of approximately \$22,500,000 for prison and hospital construction. Both the Legislative Leaders and the Executive, representing the two major political parties, are agreed on the necessity for this building program. It is the result of the neglect of administrations many, many years ago, for which we must now pay. It is my opinion, however, that this building program should be financed by a bond issue extending over a considerable period, for these new buildings will last for many generations. This is a principle long recognized in private business enter-

prise as entirely sound and one which has already been approved by the voters of the State with respect to State Office Buildings and such structures.

Anticipating the mandatory increases in this year's budget, I recommended to the last Legislature the authorization of a \$50,000,000 bond issue for State institutions. It was my thought that this proposal should be submitted to the people at the last election and if approved, as I am sure it would have been, the money would have been available for appropriation at this session of the Legislature, and would have resulted in a budget about \$30,000,000 smaller. I am happy to report that the leaders of the Legislature are apparently in agreement with me on this proposal this year and that in succeeding years, it will not be necessary to appropriate such a large sum from the current revenues for building projects which with modern construction methods will probably be still in use a hundred years from now.

The next largest item of the budget increase is one of approximately \$15,000,000 for fixed charges. This includes a mandatory increase of nearly \$10,000,000 in State Aid for education, in accordance with the policy adopted by the people of the State some time ago. It also includes an increase of more than \$5,500,000 in interest charges on the State Aid which is in part accounted for by the sale of State bonds for the more speedy removal of grade crossings.

There are also items of several million dollars for maintenance and care of the increased number of patients in our State hospitals and other State institutions. Of course, as the population of our institutions grows, we must increase the number of attendants and administrative employees who look after their welfare.

The total of these necessary and unavoidable increases is approximately \$48,000,000, but, as I have said, through savings in other directions, we have reduced this increase by \$2,000,000.

As the business of the state grows each year corresponding to the growth of the State itself, the cost of government at Albany must necessarily show a corresponding increase. I am confident, however, that irrespective of the cries of politicians seeking to make political capital out of these perfectly normal increases, all that the people of the State ask is that their money be carefully spent and full value in terms of service to the citizens and in the care of the State's wards be given.

I am glad to be able to report to the people of the State that at the present

time there is no such attempt to play politics with the State's business and there is every indication that the majority in the Legislature, which is of the opposite party, will adopt the budget substantially as submitted to the Legislature by me.

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ELECTION LAW REFORM—PRISONS—WATER POWER DEVELOPMENT—PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATION—LOCAL TAXATION REDUCTION—EXECUTIVE BUDGET—STATE CONSTRUCTION

It is nearly three months since I have made a radio report to the people of the State and in the meantime a good many matters of interest have happened. The elections passed off quietly, but I want to call attention to the fact that nothing has yet been done to improve our election laws along lines that have been recommended for a number of years. We still have several communities, one of the important ones being Rochester, where the Boards of Election are not bi-partisan. This, of course, should be remedied. Secondly, we should extend the voting machines to those parts of the State which have not yet installed them. The only argument against it is the cost and in a few years these machines really pay for themselves and save money. If we had machines everywhere, we would end the accusations in regard to withholding election returns in close elections. Finally, we ought to change the law so as to make candidates report their election expenses during the campaign and before Election Day, instead of on November twenty-fifth as at present.

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