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

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**Albany, NY - Report on 1930 Legislative Session**

## Radio Address, Albany, April 16, 1930

*Discussion of 1930 Legislative Session—First Report to the People*

This is the first of two informal reports to the people of this State on what the Legislature of 1930 has and has not accomplished.

The Legislature finally adjourned last Friday night at about two o'clock in the morning, after as hectic a final two weeks as I have ever seen. Before that final period, three weeks ago, I informed you of the radio audience that the Legislature had been in session for nearly three months and had taken action on but one really important piece of legislation. I must certainly give credit to the Legislature for acting on a very large percentage of measures during the final two weeks, even though it was the same old story of sitting here in Albany month after month without action, while a small group of leaders were trying to make up their minds what to do. This way of handling business means, of course, that no proper consideration or debate can be given during the last few days, especially when bills are actually passing the Assembly or the Senate at the rate of two or three a minute. It is all very well to say that this is the usual method of procedure. That is perfectly true, but it does not get away from the fact that the rank and file of Senators and Assemblymen have no opportunity to know anything about or study the great majority of bills that actually pass or are defeated.

By the way, our sister State of New Jersey has inaugurated this year a new method of legislating and it is well worth watching. In Trenton the Legislature meets in January and sits for several weeks. During this period any bills may be introduced; then the Legislature adjourns for several weeks and the committees of the Legislature during that period give consideration to all of the bills that have been introduced. Again the Legislature convenes and proceeds to discuss and act on the various bills, but no new bills can be introduced, and this affords plenty of time for every member to give consideration and study to the measures that are before them. It is certainly an orderly way of proceeding and apparently avoids the last minute scramble which takes place in this State.

Now as to what our Legislature of 1930 has accomplished. Today I will give a brief review of the more important measures, except those relating to the development of electricity on the St. Lawrence and the whole public utility subject. Those I will take up a week from today because they form a special subject of very great importance to every householder.

At the head of the list of accomplishments this year I would put the Old Age Relief Law, because this bill will affect every community in the State. I made this subject of old age security against want one of my principal pledges when I ran for Governor in 1928, and I am happy indeed that this first step has been taken. It means that from now on no man or woman need fear starvation or the lack of a roof over his or her head when he or she reaches old age. It means that the locality and the State will join in seeing that these old people do not suffer actual want. The bill, however, does not go as far as I had hoped, for we must do more than see that old people merely have food and lodging. I hope that next year the Legislature will be able to work out a plan under some form of contributory system so that in addition to food and lodging, all citizens will be sure that in their old age they will be able to live in some kind of ease and comfort as well. Furthermore, instead of an arbitrary age limit for the beginning of relief, we shall probably come to some form of indeterminate period based on the actual ability of old people to take care of themselves. In some cases this is well past seventy and in other cases the time comes at a much earlier age, depending wholly on the individual case.

I think the next most important contribution of the Legislature was what they have done for the wards of the State. First of all, in regard to the actual housing of patients and prisoners, they have appropriated nearly thirty million dollars for hospitals and prisons. If the bond issue which I asked for last year had been given, at least twenty millions out of this amount could have been paid for from a bond issue, thus reducing the budget

of the State by that amount this year. I am glad to say that the Legislature did approve the fifty million dollar bond issue for the wards of the State this year and it will be submitted to the voters this autumn. I hope, of course, that there will be but little opposition to it for two very good reasons: The first is that the bonded debt of this State is very low in comparison with other states, either on a basis of population or of wealth; and the second is that good business principles demand that buildings which are to last seventy-five or a hundred years at least should be paid for over a period of twenty-five or thirty years instead of being paid for out of the taxpayers' pocketbooks in one year or two years. The alternative to a bond issue is, of course, the imposing of new or additional taxes. We cannot avoid the actual building operations, because we have neglected them for many years, and we cannot turn the insane or the prisoners out into the streets for lack of a sufficient number of beds.

In connection with this same subject, the Legislature approved the setting up of a new Parole System. This is a great step and will over a period of years recognize that the great majority of prisoners return to their communities and their neighbors and must, if possible, be rehabilitated so that they will not commit further crimes and return to prison.

The Legislature revised and strengthened the banking laws though not to the extent to which I had hoped.

You will remember that for two years I begged for a commission to go to the roots of Judicial Reform. We need quicker and cheaper justice; we need to get away from the idea that there is one law for the poor and one for the rich. I had insisted that in this study laymen as well as lawyers should take part. I am very glad to say that the Legislature this year recognized that principle and a commission of laymen as well as lawyers will begin work this summer on this great subject. We can not expect the millennium in one year, but I am very confident that this is the beginning of substantial improvement in the whole judicial system of the State. New York is taking the lead in this reform for which there is a demand throughout the United States.

Next there comes a number of subjects of State-wide interest, but of lesser importance. Most of you are interested in some of them at least.

For instance, the Legislature has authorized the appointment of a commission to study the present patchwork Tax System of New York State with a view to distributing more equitably the tax burdens. The commission is to consist of nine members, three appointed by the temporary President of the Senate, three by the Speaker of the Assembly and three by the Governor. You will remember that one of my first acts as Governor was to appoint an Agricultural Advisory Commission and that this commission recommended legislation which was passed last year and which somewhat lightened the burden of taxation in the farm sections of the State. This was accomplished principally by the enactment of a gasoline tax law and the assumption by the State of the county's share of the cost of constructing State highways. Additional aid was also provided for rural schools, thus making possible a reduction in taxes on farm property in every case where the local officials saw fit to pass on to the taxpayer the savings effected.

These laws were really emergency measures designed to meet the very serious situation arising from too heavy taxation of farm properties. Members of the Agricultural Commission and all others who studied the problem were agreed that some more complete plan of tax revision should be undertaken. I hope this new commission will be able to report to the next Legislature a plan for the setting up of a scientific tax structure for this State, so that no taxpayer shall pay more or less than his share for the support of Government, whether he pay taxes on real estate, on his earned income or in the various other ways in which State revenues are now collected. In this connection it is gratifying to note that the Legislature this year passed a bill under the terms of which the State assumes the county's share in the construction of bridges on State highways. A bill to accomplish this was passed last year, but it carried no appropriation and was accordingly, wholly ineffective, I was obliged to veto it. Certain politicians

more interested in party success than the welfare of the farming population of the State, sought to make political capital out of this veto, but I am sure the people generally were not fooled. This year the Legislature passed an honest bridge cost bill and henceforth those who pay taxes on real estate will not have to carry this burden.

There are indications that New York's wonderful Barge Canal, on which we have spent so many millions and which has been so effective in keeping at a reasonable level freight rates on certain commodities, all to the benefit of the people of the State, may soon become more than a Barge Canal. It is proposed by some that the canal be taken over by the Federal Government and be deepened and widened to provide a more adequate inland waterway from the Great Lakes to the Hudson River. The Legislature at my request provided for a commission to confer with the Federal Government in working out a plan of transfer.

It is also very gratifying that the majority in the Legislature has at last agreed to abolish the wholly needless and costly State Census and to substitute for purposes of reapportionment, the Federal Census which is now being taken. Last year no action was taken on my recommendation that a constitutional amendment to abolish the State Census be submitted, but this year such a resolution was passed and it is probable that the last State Census has been taken, and the people of the State will be saved this expense in 1935.

The splendid work of our excellent State Police Department received deserved recognition at the hands of the Legislature this year in the form of increased pay.

Our great State Park program, the most extensive ever undertaken, has been continued with the exception of one park where I fear personal spite governed the action of the majority leaders in refusing what I consider to be necessary appropriations.

In the enactment of this year's budget, the second constitutional Executive Budget, the Legislature definitely recognized the principle of spending on our highways all the money received in gas and license taxes, thus establishing a perfectly balanced system of taxation and insuring the continued expansion of our State System of Highways.

The Legislature also adopted another of my recommendations which provided for experimental tree planting along State highways. It is hoped this will lead to a general landscaping of our motor routes, making them in all cases parkways as well as mere strips of concrete leading from place to place. A local bill in line with this idea permits the supervisors of Montgomery County to take advantage of the offer of a citizen of that county to erect rows of elm trees along both sides of the Mohawk Turnpike for a distance of two miles.

On the recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Commission the Legislature increased the amount of State Aid for town roads and placed the distribution of the aid on a mileage instead of a property valuation basis. This will, I hope, result in the improvement of at least some dirt roads over which so many of our farmers still must travel before reaching improved highways in carrying their products to market.

The Legislature also appropriated \$100,000 to be used in experimental study for surfacing these lesser traveled highways. It is hoped to develop a practical but inexpensive type of hard surface road which will enable the State speedily to eliminate the mudholes which now keep a considerable part of our population virtually cut off from cities and villages during the early weeks of the spring. Every one who has lived on or now lives on a farm off the main road knows what a benefit this will be.

We are now passing through a period of industrial depression which has resulted in widespread unemployment. New York State usually suffers more acutely in these periods of hard times because many unemployed from other states come here seeking work, adding considerably to the total of those who are without employment. Feeling that our duty is first to our own citizens and hoping to discourage somewhat the influx of unemployed from other states, I requested the Legislature to re-enact the law of 1909

which provides that citizens of New York State shall be given preference on all State work. This is especially important this year because of our extensive hospital building program.

The Legislature also agreed to a consolidation of the functions of the Port of New York Authority and the New York and New Jersey Bridge and Tunnel Commission. The latter Commission has virtually completed its highly creditable work of constructing the Holland Tunnel connecting Manhattan with New Jersey. There is a need for more such links, either tunnels or bridges, but it seemed to me desirable that the work should be undertaken by a single agency charged with the preparation and carrying out of a comprehensive plan of development for the Port of New York.

I am sorry I cannot report a more generally liberal attitude on the part of the legislative majority with respect to progressive Labor and Welfare measures. Certain rather grudging concessions have been given, but once more we must look to another Legislature for these desirable reforms.

The Legislature failed, for instance, to include all occupational diseases within the coverage of the Workmen's Compensation Law, although five occupational diseases were added to the very small list now coming within the law.

Likewise, the Legislature again failed to enact a genuine Eight-Hour day and Forty-eight Hour Week for Women in industry.

The proposal for the establishment of an Advisory Fair Wage Board for women and children in industry also was defeated.

No progress was made with respect to providing that the Anti-Monopoly Law shall not apply to the labor of human beings.

A bill was passed prohibiting the granting of injunctions in labor disputes, except upon notice to the other party.

The Legislature promptly acceded to my suggestion that Congress be asked to do away with appeals by telephone and other utility companies to the Federal Courts before they have exhausted their remedies in New York State Courts.

In the closing hours of the session, after I had sent a special message, the Legislature provided a splendid appropriation for the development of Saratoga Springs as a great health center for our citizens.

In order to be fair in this listing of what our Legislature has done, it is of course necessary to give the other side of the picture—to list the things which were of great need to the State, but on which either no action at all was taken or action which did not go to the root of the matter.

First in this list I would put the failure of the Legislature to do anything substantial in regard to the control of public utilities. There was a tremendous lot of talk about this whole subject but very little actual results. I will go into the details of this a week from now.

You will remember that for two years I have begged the Legislature for some substantial reforms in the whole structure of local Government. A Legislative Commission to study what is known as the Town Law has been in session year after year and this year made a report, suggesting many drastic changes in local Government, but I am sorry to say that politicians, seeing only the political side of things in their own individual home towns, prevented the bill from even being voted on.

It has been my thought that Town Government and County Government can be greatly improved and brought up to 1930 business standards. It has not been my idea that these reforms should be forced on any community, but rather that the more progressive communities of the State should be given the option, if they so desire, to put these business reforms into effect. Nothing, however, was done by the Legislature and I hope that this year you will elect assemblymen and senators to the next Legislature who will forget purely local political considerations and think of the good of the whole State and of the application of modern business principles to local Government.

Please remember the fact that I have been trying to drive home for nearly a year and a half to every one of you people who pay local taxes on farms, or dwellings, or city property, or any other kind of real estate. Those taxes

are spent wholly in local Government, town or county, or village, or city. Not one red cent of what you pay in taxes on year real estate comes to Albany. Every cent of it is used locally by your Town Board, by your Village Trustees, by your County Supervisors, or by your City Government. Do not blame Albany if your taxes go up. These taxes go up for local needs and the responsibility is a local matter and not attributable to the State Government. We here in Albany can not help you unless you help yourselves, except that the Legislature can by passing laws modernizing local Government make it much easier for you to save taxes at home in the years to come.

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