
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Before National Democratic Club, New York City, October 3, 1930

Acceptance Address of Governor Roosevelt

Two years ago I accepted the nomination for Governor, because I wanted to be a disciple in a great cause—a cause that needed little explaining to the citizens of the State of New York.

I am here once more to accept the nomination for Governor for the simple reason that I still march forward in that cause.

My theme then was that progressive Government, by its very terms, must be a living and a growing thing, that the battle for it is never ending and that if we let up for one single moment or one single year, not merely do we stand still but we fall back in the march of civilization.

During the four administrations of my great predecessor the ground of progress had to be fought for inch by inch, and the same fact holds true of these two years past. Every known kind of wall and boulder has been thrown across our path, sometimes the obstruction of mere inertia, sometimes the opposition of those who for personal, selfish reasons have feared the effect of new things upon their own personal interests. But most often the barrier has been, day in and day out, now in the open, now under cover, the opposition of a Republican leadership which seems to be based primarily on the high minded, idealistic purpose of discrediting, through me, any and every proposal of the Party which I represent, regardless of merit or reason.

Let me make it perfectly clear that in my judgment this Republican leadership does not represent the great rank and file of the men and women of this State who call themselves Republicans. Let me make it perfectly clear that I am confident that they, in large numbers, will recognize this autumn, as they have recognized before, that Government at Albany must be and shall be progressive, and that they are still as out of step with the leadership of their own Party as they have been in the past.

Now let us look for a moment at the facts. Two years ago in my speech of acceptance I stressed five great objectives:

p. 259

1. A program of social legislation to make New York the leader among her sister States. This has been adopted and our task now is to see that that leadership shall be maintained in the days to come.

2. I advocated a definite program for the development of the vast Water Power resources of the State under constant governmental control and possession. The capitulation of the Republican leaders in response to public pressure is still fresh in our minds. One of the great issues this autumn is whether this great policy shall be maintained and carried through or whether the State will revert, either openly or by hidden means, to private ownership.

3. I spoke also of the vital need of a comprehensive study by laymen and lawyers of the whole system of the Administration of Justice. Here again it took two years before the Republican leaders capitulated, but now at last we are about to take action. Whether the result of this study proves to be more than a mere report of a committee depends on the future drive and leadership in Albany.

4. I spoke also of the great problems that faced our agricultural communities. Once more we have a definite record of definite results, following an Agricultural Program initiated by me, a program for which I received the splendid cooperation of all of the agricultural interests of the State, regardless of Party, a program which the Republican leaders were compelled to adopt when they came to the sudden realization of the fact that for a generation they had been in control of the Legislature and during that whole period had never once gone to the root of the farm problem. Today agriculture in the State of New York is beginning to get on its feet, and the simple question is whether the existing program shall be further extended and amplified during the next two years or whether we will go back to the period of inaction and drift.

5. Last of all, I recommended the reorganization of the lower units of County and Town Government, applying the same principles which had already been so successfully worked out in the reorganization of the State Government. That this should be done under the permissive principle of Home Rule, I have made wholly clear at all times. This great reform has remained pigeon-holed in the desks of the Republican legislative leaders at Albany. It is the one outstanding recommendation of mine which has been thwarted at every turn. The selfish, partisan reasons behind the inaction of these leaders is apparent to everyone; still I am confident that the force of public opinion behind a driving leadership, based on the principles of good government, rather than on the dictates of partisan advantage, will bring inevitable results.

There are, of course, other matters which the voters of the State will scan this autumn. Some of them relate to the individual candidates, now that they have been named by all parties.

For instance, three days ago I asked my distinguished opponent whether or not he would sign a State Enforcement Act, a question based on a widespread belief that some agreement of this kind was made to secure the support of Assemblyman Jenks and other dry leaders who have fought for this measure for so many years. It required over two days of painful meditation before a reply to this very simple question could be prepared, and it is noteworthy that the answer was not forthcoming until my friend had hastened over to Philadelphia and consulted with the President himself. His answer bears earmarks of the President's policy of being wet and dry at the same time. It is characteristic of the way the question was dodged in the national campaign in calling the Eighteenth Amendment a "noble experiment."

For the benefit of the wet members of his party, my opponent starts out by declaring that he has "no hesitancy"—there is a touch of humor, remembering the forty-eight hours, in that "no hesitancy" phrase—"in declaring that the National Law forms a part of the State Law anyhow and that the urgent thing is to proceed with enforcement rather than to defer to the possible passage of some particular bill." This is a long and lawyer-like way of saying "Yes" and at the same time "No." But the shadow of Assemblyman Jenks falling across his page at this particular point, and

remembering his confidential conversations with that gentleman, he hastened to add that the Nuisance Law already affords a state enforcement possibility and that if "experience demonstrates that this law should be strengthened in order to fulfill its purpose more effectively, I would favor such strengthening." Just what does this mean? Does it mean a State Enforcement Act in some spots and not in others? It must be clear to everybody what it means. No wonder Mr. Jenks approved of his candidacy. His recent statement only advocates what Mr. Jenks and the drys have tried to do for the past two years, to pass the State Enforcement Act, and failing that, to pass an enabling act that would give us a Volstead law county by county.

Listen to what he says:—

"I believe that legislation extending to counties or other political subdivisions full power within their own borders to use their local courts and police in the enforcement of prohibition should be immediately enacted."

And then he goes on to say:

"I would not approve a State-wide measure following the provisions of the Volstead Act."

I asked him, "Will you, or will you not approve a State Enforcement Act?" And he said, "I will not approve a State-wide Enforcement Act."

Who is hedging now? Oh yes, "wet to the wets and dry to the drys." The same old story of Republican hypocrisy.

I noticed that my distinguished opponent is troubled and sollicitous over what someone has told him. He thinks that there appears to be a discrepancy between my general views as to party planks and the party platform itself. I use the term "what someone has told him" advisedly, because it is evident that he himself cannot possibly have read the platform. The platform says the Democratic Party pledges itself to the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and to such measures as will definitely and effectively banish the saloon. I stand definitely on that platform.

I note, too, that he has discovered the existence of the Nuisance Law—this marvelous weapon which has lain idle and which the drys can feel sure he will strengthen and make effective, if he is elected Governor. In a speech last night, and in articles printed in one of our great papers and to which no denial has been made as yet, a certain Major Campbell flatly claims that his efforts as Prohibition Director to invoke the Nuisance Law in the City of New York were blocked by Mr. Tuttle whenever called to his attention.

And as long as I am speaking of my distinguished opponent, let me say that I am afraid he has been so long a prosecuting officer, who looks at everything with the viewpoint of securing a conviction in any way possible, that his sense of abstract justice has been somewhat blunted and that he thinks in terms of convictions rather than in terms of judicial determination. This is rather amusingly illustrated by his proclamation that I had given the special Grand Jury a "wooden hatchet" with which to do its work. Permit me to inform him that I did not give the Grand Jury a hatchet of any kind, wooden or otherwise. Their weapons are the scales of justice and the sword of justice, to protect the innocent as well as to punish the guilty.

During the next two weeks, as you know, it will be necessary for me to spend nearly the whole of my time, under the Constitution and the law, in the preparation of the Executive Budget. During this time I can give little thought to the campaign or to myself as your candidate. During these two years I have believed that a personal, first-hand knowledge of the needs and conditions of every part of the State would fit me best for the task of Chief Executive. It is for this reason that I have visited every part of the State and have sought all possible information. I read that my distinguished opponent has announced that he is going to proceed upstate and, as he was quoted in the press, "get down among the people." I know the people will be properly flattered at his condescension, his descent from the high heights he occupies and I hope, at the same time, he will inform himself on those great matters of State policy about which he has as yet said nothing, those vital questions affecting the welfare and the prosperity of all our fellow citizens, men and women, rich and poor. These are the real issues of this

campaign. He will find his visit among the people most illuminating and informative.

We now enter formally into the campaign. Never has a Party gone before the public with a finer record of platform pledges fulfilled. What we have done in the past two years will, I am certain, convince the great majority of our voters that what we promise to do in the next two years, if we are retained in power, is not empty words but solemn pledges which will be fulfilled in the future as our pledges have been fulfilled in the past.

Lack of leadership at Washington has brought our country face to face with serious questions of unemployment and financial depression. Each State must meet this situation as best it can, and I am sure that at this critical period the sober judgment of the electorate of the Empire State will lead them to vote for that Party which for many years past has so wisely guided the policy and so greatly increased the prosperity of this greatest of all Commonwealths of the Union.
