
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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1930 October 21

**Rochester, NY - Campaign Speech -
State Institutions**

ADDRESS OF GOV. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

DELIVERED AT ROCHESTER, N. Y.,

October 21, 1930.

GOV. ROOSEVELT: When the present history of the State of New York is written a generation hence, the years 1929 and 1930 will be marked with a double star because these two years have seen, in my judgment, a notable change in popular understanding in relation to two great problems of modern humanity.

Most of us know that nearly 100 years ago, an Englishman by the name of Charles Dickens, did more than any other individual to revolutionize the whole prison system of England. Through his writings he gave people to understand that for the first time their unfortunate brethren who, for one reason or another were committed to jail, were still human beings; that jail conditions throughout England were horrible beyond belief, and that these jail conditions had not changed for the better in any material respect since the Dark Ages of a thousand years before.

In the days of Charles Dickens, most of Europe, and, we, here in the United States also, began to replace the dungeons and filth and starvation and nakedness and immorality of the older prisons with new structures which, in 1830 and 1840, were considered models of their kind. During that period nearly a hundred years ago, the State of New York erected the great prison structures at Sing Sing, Auburn, and at Dannemora. And, with the exception of the newer prison at Great Meadows, we have carried on, during this whole time, with these cell blocks of now very ancient vintage.

Is it any wonder that these structures are out of date?

It is a fact that for many years, the handful of people who are really interested in prison reform and in bettering the conditions of prisons and prisoners, have been demanding new buildings and a new system throughout the State. The difficulty has been, frankly, that the public itself has taken little or no interest, and the result has been that for the past 20 years, we have had only piecemeal reform.

During the past few years, however, startling events all over the United States have brought the whole prison problem to the front. First came the crime wave itself, and with it, a new type of prisoner. Then came a series of riots in the prisons of many different states and in Federal prisons as well. This was followed by a publicity for the whole subject which is at least bearing good fruit.

A year ago last summer I held a conference with the legislative leaders, and we entered into a gentleman's agreement for a building program to cost \$30,000,000 — \$10,000,000 a year for 3 years — which program will completely rebuild our antiquated structures, give decent living conditions, good sanitation, plenty of exercise, new forms of labor and instruction, and finally, though by no means the least important, a system of parole which is aimed to give the best possible chance to every individual prisoner to rehabilitate himself as a law-abiding respected member of the community in which he lives, in the shortest possible time.

It seems a pity that any person or persons should treat this great prison program from a partisan or a political point of view. Its importance is far greater than that of any individual candidate or any individual political party. Men and women of both parties are working today with whole-hearted unselfishness, working with the Governor and with the Legislature in the carrying out of this program. I make a special appeal, not as a candidate for office, but as Governor of this state, to every man and woman voter, to interest themselves not in the politics of prison reform, but in the humanity and the practical purposes of prison reform.

The second part of this great program relates not to prisons, but to the hospitals of the state. And here it is not because of any particular lack of public interest, but because of an increase in the wards of the state beyond any previous estimate, that we have been facing an emergency during these two years.

Very soon after we took office, Lieutenant Governor Lehman and I began a systematic inspection of the hospitals of the State. We found the condition of overcrowding to be more than serious. It was disgraceful to our state and a distinct handicap in caring for the patients along modern medical and scientific lines.

Let me give you some very simple figures. I wonder whether the people of this state have any idea as to the rapidity with which our State Hospitals for the Insane are filling up. The statistician of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Frederick

W. Brown, has made a computation which shows that one new patient enters our State Hospitals in this state every 43 minutes, night and day, throughout the year.

We now have in our Insane Asylums, alone, about 47,000 patients, which means 12,000 more than the quarters are intended for. The state has five state schools for mental defectives and a special hospital in which they now have actually 8,000 patients, which means 1,500 more than we have adequate accommodations for.

This has meant that in practically every hospital and state school the actual sleeping quarters of the patients have been so over-crowded that the beds are literally touching each other, and many of the patients have had to sleep out in the corridors.

This means also that it is impossible to give the individual attention and care to each patient that ought to be given.

Remember, that these patients come from every county and almost every community in the state — 55,000 of them in all. They have been our neighbors and our friends, and under modern medical care, a very large percentage of them can be cured and returned to their families and their homes. This is an actual fact proven by figures, — a practical matter, in addition to the broad humanity of its aspect.

A year ago last winter, realizing these conditions, I asked the Legislature to submit to the people a proposal for the issue of \$50,000,000 in bonds so that the building program for more

beds in these hospitals and the new hospitals could be immediately started — started at the rate of \$20,000,000 a year.

The Legislature, I am sorry to say, did not go along with me in this. If they had, if they had had the financial understanding, and the business sense, how much better the situation would be today. If the bond issue had gone through a year ago, this state would not have had to dip into current tax receipts for \$20,000,000 for new hospital buildings. That \$20,000,000 could have been used either for lowering taxes or else it could have gone into more public works for the relief of unemployment.

In the summer of 1929 I held a conference with the Legislative leaders, who again refused to authorize a bond issue. But they assured me that during the 1930 session, they would approve appropriations for 6000 new beds. As this was the best I could do, I went along with them and during last autumn, the plans for the new buildings were prepared by the State Architect. The Legislature, at the end of February, appropriated the money; bids were asked for immediately; the contracts were let at the end of March; and work began in April. Today, the walls of nearly all of these great structures to hold these 6000 patients are up; they are being put under roof and most of them will be ready for occupancy next summer. That, I think, constitutes a record of building construction which no other state can equal.

The point I want to drive home tonight is that both in the hospital and the prison programs, I have laid down a perfectly

definite and comprehensive plan pointing to the year 1935. In the case of the prisons, this means the appropriation of \$20,000,000 more, \$10,000,000 next year, and \$10,000,000 the year after, thus giving us completed prisons by 1935, capable of housing under modern conditions every one of the 9,500 prisoners which the state is estimating to have in that year.

In the case of the hospitals we must provide 6,000 more beds by the legislature next year; and 6,000 in 1932; and when the resulting buildings are all completed by 1935, they will house under proper conditions all of the hospital wards which the state will have on that date, and also relieve the overcrowding in the present institutions.

The total program for hospitals and prisons, will cost about \$70,000,000 and it will be impossible to pay for this out of current revenues unless the state raises that amount by new taxation. We are all, I think, opposed to that, and this is the primary reason for the bond issue which will be submitted to the voters of the state on November 4th this year. This \$50,000,000 bond issue is to be used at the rate of not more than \$20,000,000 a year towards the program of hospitals and prisons. Here again, partisan politics play absolutely no part. Furthermore, common sense dictates that the cost of the greater part of these splendid new buildings should be spread over a period of years. The buildings themselves are of the most modern permanent fire-proof type of construction; and it is reasonable to assume that they will be useful

to the state for at least 100 years to come. To spread this cost over a period of 25 years is in accordance with sound business principles, and at the same time lifts that much burden from the backs of the taxpayers this year and the following two years. It must be clearly understood that if the bond issue does not go through, some new tax will have to be imposed.

It has been well said that with the money available from current taxes, the problem has been too colossal for the state to cope with, and the only hope of relief is through a continuing program of construction at a rate which will catch up on the overcrowding during the next five years.

I am making tonight not a partisan appeal as a candidate, but I am making an appeal as Governor of the State to every voter, Republican, Democrat, Socialist and Independent, men and women, to vote, "yes" on the bond issue.

How splendid it will be if you and I can say five years from now, "at last, the State of New York cannot be reproached for inadequate housing of its wards." We, as citizens, it seems to me, at least owe our wards, clothing and food and a decent roof over their heads — but we owe also, whether they are mentally or physically ill, or whether they are under correctional treatment, the highest type of medical and educational care.

We, in this state, have established a new system of parole for prisoners. This system is in charge of a parole board of experts recently created at my suggestion by the legislature.

The purpose of the creation of this new parole board was not in any sense to make parole more easy or parole supervision more lenient. It was rather to make it more scientific and more effective. It was to give to the case of each prisoner the best that modern thought and modern social science could provide so that his individual case can be studied with a view towards rehabilitating him to as good citizenship as possible.

This new parole board is now functioning. I believe that under its careful and scientific supervision we shall find that there will be an increase in the proportion of those who, on leaving prison, go straight and become good citizens. Don't forget that out of every 100 men who are sent to prison, 92 of them come out again. Are you not interested in what they are when they return to live as our neighbors?

Let us, by providing accommodations which meet the essentials at least of decency, help build for better social conditions in the generations to come.

Along with the dilapidated and antiquated prisons and hospitals which we have inherited from past generations, there is an institution which you and I both want to see eliminated as far as possible. This institution can never be made to conform with our modern social consciousness, no matter how much money we put in them or how much we improve their physical plan.

I mean, the "Poor House". An alarmingly increasing number of aged persons are becoming dependent on outside help for bare

maintenance. No greater tragedy exists in modern civilization than the aged worker, who, after a life of ceaseless effort and useful productivity must look forward for his declining years to a "poor house".

It is, to my mind, no longer proper to provide for our aged destitute citizens in a "poor house", where that can be avoided. Nothing is so horrible a nightmare to workers of our state as the fear of that gloomy institution. This state, for some time past has abandoned the policy of taking care of orphans in Orphan Asylums. We have substituted for this archaic system a new one of child welfare and widows' pensions, whereby the state and locality contribute to the maintenance of children in their own homes, although the breadwinner of the family may have been taken away. Money has been given to the mothers of fatherless children so that they may maintain their children at home instead of sending them to an institution.

Mind you, it is not only a more humane and merciful solution of the problem, but in the long run, will be even more economical, since the child can be maintained at home for even less than the cost, of decent, modern orphan asylums.

The same arrangement, of course, should be made for our aged poor. They should not be taken away from their homes and placed in hospitals and public institutions. If the state and localities want to aid these people in their declining years, it should not be done in a poor house, but should be done under conditions

where they may maintain in their own homes, their independent lives and hold up their heads as citizens of America.

As soon as I came to Albany, I recommended to the Legislature the creation of a commission to study this whole question. That commission made the study and reported a plan to the Legislature for assistance to aged citizens by the State in combination with the various counties. Pursuant to that report, legislation was passed whereby aged citizens of the State, over 70 years of age, who were without means of support and who must look to society to save them from starvation, will receive financial assistance, so that their remaining years may be spent in their own homes with at least the bare necessities of life. Applications for this relief are now being received by the thousands.

We, in this state have thus at least made a start in our sacred duty of taking care of our dependent aged. It is to my mind, only a start. I hope to see the time come when this relief of old age assistance will not in any way even resemble a dole system.

I look forward to the time when every young man and young woman entering industrial or agricultural or business activity will begin to insure himself or herself against the privations of old age. The premiums which that young man or young girl will pay should be supplemented by premiums to be paid by the employers of the State as well as by the State itself. In that way, when the young man or young girl has grown to old and dependent

age, he or she will have built up an insurance fund which will maintain them in comfort in their years of reduced activity. In this way, their assistance will be a result of their own efforts and foresightedness. They will be getting not charity, but the natural profits of their years of labor and insurance. I hope to have the opportunity of continuing my efforts to obtain this kind of old age insurance which our most progressive thought demands.

Connected with this question of our institutions and the inmates thereof, is another question of extreme social importance. It is because of my deep interest in modern social problems such as proper housing facilities for the wards of the state and for effective means of combatting crime in general that I have considered so earnestly the whole question of temperance. It is bound up, of course, with crime, with insanity, and only too often, with poverty. It is increasingly apparent that intoxication has no place in this new mechanized civilization of ours! In our industry -- in our recreation -- on our highways -- in our very sports -- a drunken man is more than an objectionable companion; he is a peril to the rest of us.

The hand that controls the machinery of our factories -- that holds the steering wheels of our automobiles -- the brain that decides the course of our huge financial organizations, should alike be free from the effects of drugs or alcohol.

To those interested in social progress the question of temperance and the reduction of intoxication has always proven a

most serious and difficult problem. I believe that the solution which was attempted by the American people after the war, the solution by legislative and constitutional fiat, has been a complete and tragic failure. It has been a failure for two major reasons; in the first place, it has attempted to legislate into being a condition that cannot be attained by legislation but only by the slow and orderly process of education; and, secondly, because it has attempted to encroach upon fields which should belong exclusively to the respective states of the Union.

I need not point out to you the general encouragement to lawlessness and to a widespread disrespect of law itself which has resulted from this attempt.

I need not point out to you that it has been a prolific source of corruption, hypocrisy, crime, and disorder. The situation has become impossible and intolerable. I, for one, believe that it is time to retrace our steps, -- for we find that we have wandered far from the firm road toward eventual temperance into a hopeless morass of crime and law defiance.

We must start afresh. And the first step of that start should be as quickly as possible, -- the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.

It is becoming almost obvious that each sovereign state in the Union should be given the right to determine for itself whether alcoholic beverages should be made, manufactured, sold or transported within its borders.

Following the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, New York State must and will take such regulatory measures, as will promote temperance, definitely and effectively banish the saloon, and recognize the principle of home rule in all localities.

I stand flatly upon my party's platform; and I assure you that all of the Democratic candidates are united in this position. There is no diversity or doubt among us. We stand together. We do not attempt, one of us, to appeal to one portion of the state's population, while another appeals to a different portion.

We believe that the people of this state as a whole are interested in temperance -- that they want temperance by constitutional and orderly means. While we have the greatest respect for those in our state who still believe that temperance can be best served by the continuance of Federal constitutional and legislative enactment, we disagree with them as to method. We believe that the whole question should be left to the determination of the respective states themselves.

And so we regard this question as a part of that larger program of social reform and progress. We believe indeed that a solution of it will help solve the state's problem with respect to its institutions and with respect to the needs of its citizens.

What I have discussed here tonight are but parts of this whole question of the state's attitude towards social problems. A proper solution of them will, of course, take a long time. There are things, however, which the voters of the state can do to help this fall.

Above all, I urge you to vote on non-political and non-partisan grounds for the \$50,000,000 bond issue. I appeal to Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike to help sustain the arm of the State in its treatment of the wards of the State. May we put partisanship aside and place the state of New York once and for all in the van -- a model state -- a state of which our children can well be proud.

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Betterment of Conditions for Institutional Care of Wards of the State

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS

ROCHESTER, October 21, 1930.

When the present history of the State of New York is written a generation hence, the years 1929 and 1930 will be marked with a double star because these two years have seen, in my judgment, a notable change in popular understanding in relation to two great problems of modern humanity.

Most of us know that nearly 100 years ago, an Englishman by the name of Charles Dickens, did more than any other individual to revolutionize the whole prison system of England. Through his writings, he gave people to understand that for the first time their unfortunate brethren who for one reason or another were committed to jail, were still human beings; that jail conditions throughout England were horrible beyond belief, and that these jail conditions had not changed for the better in any material respect since the Dark Ages of a thousand years before.

In the days of Charles Dickens, most of Europe, and, we, here in the United States also, began to replace the dungeons and filth and starvation and nakedness and immorality of the older prisons with new structures which, in 1830 and 1840, were considered models of their kind. During that period nearly a hundred years ago, the State of New York erected the great

prison structures at Sing Sing, Auburn, and at Dannemora. And, with the exception of the newer prison at Great Meadow, we have carried on, during this whole time, with these cell blocks of now very ancient vintage.

It is a wonder that there has been so little interest in this subject. It is a fact that for many years the handful of people who are really interested in prison reform and in bettering the conditions of prisons and prisoners, have been demanding new buildings and a new system throughout the State. The difficulty has been, frankly, that the public itself has taken little or no interest, and the result has been that for the past 20 years, we have had only piecemeal reform.

During the past few years, however, startling events all over the United States have brought the whole prison problem to the front. First came the crime wave itself, and with it, a new type of prisoner. Then came a series of riots in the prisons of many different states and in Federal prisons as well. This was followed by a publicity for the whole subject which is at last bearing good fruit.

A year ago last summer I held a conference with the legislative leaders, and we entered into a gentleman's agreement for a building program to cost \$30,000,000—\$10,000,000 a year for three years—which program will completely rebuild our antiquated structures, give decent living conditions, good sanitation, plenty of exercise, new forms of labor and instruction, and finally, though by no means the least important, a system of parole which is aimed to give the best possible chance to every individual prisoner to rehabilitate himself as a law-abiding, respected member of the community in which he lives or in the shortest possible time.

It seems a pity that any person or persons should treat this great prison program from a partisan or a political point of view. Its importance is far greater than that of any individual candidate for any individual political party. Men and women of both parties are working today with whole-hearted unselfishness, working with the Governor and with the Legislature in the carrying out of this program. I make a special appeal, not as a candidate for office, but as Governor of this State, to every man and woman voter, to interest themselves not in the politics of prison reform, but in the humanity and the practical purposes of prison reform.

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Very soon after we took office, Lieutenant-Governor Lehman and I began a systematic inspection of the hospitals of the State. We found the condition of overcrowding to be more than serious. It was disgraceful to our State and a distinct handicap in caring for the patients along modern medical and scientific lines.

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This has meant that in practically every State Hospital and State School the actual sleeping quarters of the patients have been so over-crowded that the beds are literally touching each other, and many of the patients have been forced to sleep out in the corridors.

This means also that it is impossible to give the individual attention and care to each patient that should be given.

Remember that these patients come from every county and almost every community in the State—55,000 of them in all. They have been our neighbors and our friends, and under modern medical care, a very large percentage of them can be cured and returned to their families and their homes. This is an actual fact, proved by figures, a practical matter, in addition to the broad humanity of its aspect.

A year or last winter, realizing these conditions, I asked the Legislature to submit to the people a proposal for the issue of \$50,000,000 in bonds in order that the building program designed to provide for more beds in these hospitals and the new hospitals could be immediately started—started at the rate of \$20,000,000 a year.

The Legislature, I am sorry to say, did not go along with me in this. If they had, if they had had the financial understanding, and the business sense, how much better the situation would be today. If the bond issue had gone through a year ago, this State would not have had to dip into current tax receipts for \$20,000,000 for new hospital buildings. That \$20,000,000 could have been used either for lowering taxes or else it could have gone into more public works for the relief of unemployment.

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In the case of the hospitals we must provide 6,000 more beds by the Legislature next year; and 6,000 in 1932; and when these buildings are completed in 1935, they will house under proper conditions all of the hospital wards which the State will have on that date, and also relieve the overcrowding in the present institutions.

The total program for hospitals and prisons, will cost about \$70,000,000 and it will be impossible to pay for this out of current revenues, unless the State raises that amount in new taxation. We are all, I think, opposed to that and this is the primary reason for the bond issue which will be submitted to the voters of the State on November 4th, this year. This \$50,000,000 bond issue is to be used at the rate of not more than \$20,000,000 a year towards the program of hospitals and prisons. Here again, partisan politics play absolutely no part. Furthermore, common sense dictates that the cost of the greater part of these splendid new buildings should be spread over a period of years. The buildings themselves are of the most modern permanent fire-proof type of construction; and it is reasonable to assume that they will be useful to the State for at least 100 years to come. To spread this cost over a period of 25 years is in accordance with sound business principles, and at the same time lifts that much burden from the backs of the taxpayers this year and the following two years. It must be clearly understood that if the bond issue does not go through, some new tax will have to be imposed.

It has been well said that with the money available from current taxes, the problem has been too colossal for the State to cope with, and the only hope of relief is through a continuing program of construction at a rate which will catch up on the overcrowding during the next five years.

I am making tonight not a partisan appeal as a candidate, but I am making an appeal as Governor of the State to every voter, Republican, Democrat, Socialist and Independent, men and women, to vote, "yes" on the bond issue.

How splendid it will be if you and I can say five years from now, "At last, the State of New York cannot be reproached for inadequate housing of its wards."

We, as citizens, it seems to me, at least owe our wards, clothing and food and a decent roof over their heads, but we owe also, whether they are mentally or physically ill, or whether they are under correctional treatment, the highest type of medical and educational care.

We, in this State, have established a new system of paroles for prisoners. This system is in charge of a Parole Board of experts recently created at my suggestion by the Legislature. The purpose of the creation of this new Parole Board was not in any sense to make parole more easy or parole supervision more lenient. It was rather to make it more scientific and more effective. It was to give to the care of each prisoner the best that modern thought and modern social science could provide so that his individual case can be studied with a view towards rehabilitating him to good citizenship.

This new Parole Board is now functioning. I believe that under its careful and scientific supervision we shall find that there will be an increase in the proportion of those who, on leaving prison, go straight and become good citizens. Do not forget that out of every 100 men who are sent to prison, 92 of them come out again. Are you not interested in what they are when they return to live among our neighbors?

Let us, by providing accommodations which meet the essentials, at least, of decency, help build for better social conditions in the generations to come.

Along with the dilapidated and antiquated prisons and hospitals which we have inherited from past generations, there is an institution which you and I both want to see eliminated as far as possible. This institution can never be made to conform with our modern social consciousness, no matter how much money we put in them or how much we improve their physical plan.

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It is, to my mind, longer proper to provide for our aged destitute citizens in a "poor house," where that can be avoided. Nothing is so horrible a nightmare to workers of our State as the fear of that gloomy institution. The State, for some time past has abandoned the policy of taking care of orphans in orphan asylums. We have substituted for this archaic system a new one of Child Welfare and Widows' Pensions, whereby the State and locality contribute to the maintenance of children in their own homes, although the breadwinner of the family may have been taken away. Money has been given to the mothers of fatherless children so that they may maintain their children at home instead of sending them to an institution.

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As soon as I came to Albany, I recommended to the Legislature the creation of a commission to study this whole question. That commission made the study and reported a plan to the Legislature for assistance to aged citizens of the State in combination with the various counties. Pursuant to that report, legislation was passed whereby aged citizens of the State, over 70 years of

age, who were without means of support and who must look to society to save them from starvation, will receive financial assistance, so that their remaining years may be spent in their own homes with at least the bare necessities of life. Applications for this relief are now being received by the thousands.

We, in this State, have at last made a start in our sacred duty of taking care of our dependent aged. It is to my mind, only a start. I hope to see the time come when this relief of old age assistance will not in any way even resemble a dole system.

I look forward to the time when every young man and young woman entering industrial or agricultural or business activity will begin to insure himself or herself against the privations of old age. The premiums which that young man or young girl will pay should be supplemented by premiums to be paid by the employers of the State, as well as by the State itself. In that way, when the young man or young girl has grown to old and dependent age, he or she will have built up an insurance fund which will maintain them in comfort in their years of reduced activity. In this way, their assistance will be a result of their own efforts and forethought. They will be receiving no charity, but the natural profits of their years of labor and insurance. I hope to have the opportunity of continuing my efforts to obtain this kind of old age insurance for our most progressive thought demands.

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I stand flatly upon my party's platform; and I assure you that all of the Democratic candidates are united in this position. There is no diversity

or doubt among us. We stand together. We do not attempt, one of us, to appeal to one portion of the State's population, while another appeals to a different portion.

We believe that the people of this State as a whole are interested in temperance, that they want temperance by constitutional and orderly means. While we have the greatest respect for those in our State who still believe that temperance can be best served by the continuance of Federal constitutional and legislative enactment, we disagree with them as to method. We believe that the whole question should be left to the determination of the respective States themselves.

And as we regard this question as a part of that larger program of social reform and progress. We believe indeed that a solution of it will help solve the State's problem with respect to its institutions and with respect to the needs of its citizens.

What I have discussed here tonight are but parts of this whole question of the State's attitude towards social problems. A proper solution of them will, of course, take a long time. There are things, however, which the voters of the State can do to help this fall.

Above all, I urge you to vote on non-political and non-partisan grounds for the \$50,000,000 bond issue. I appeal to Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike to help sustain the arm of the State in its treatment of the wards of the State.

May we put partisanship aside and place the State of New York once and for all in the van—a model State—a State of which our children can well be proud.