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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
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**Radio Address re 1931 Legislative Session**

## Radio Address, Albany, April 24, 1931

### *Accomplishments and Failures of Legislative Session of 1931*

P. 722  
In accordance with what I have made an annual custom during the past two years, I am making this brief report to the people of the State, summarizing the results of the legislative session that has just closed. I take it that the average man and woman in our State has read the high lights of what has taken place in Albany since January first, but I take it also that you will be interested in having me tell you in broad terms of what the Legislature did and what it did not do.

First of all, however, let me make it clear that this is not in any shape, manner or form a partisan plea for though it necessarily represents my own point of view, I shall try to be just as fair as I possibly can in stating the pros and cons of the various problems of public policy with which the Legislature and I have had to deal.

Actually 1120 bills passed the Legislature out of a total of about 4312 that were introduced in one branch or the other. Of course, many of these bills were introduced in both houses and were therefore duplicates. While the Legislature deserves credit without question for not passing all the bills that were introduced, I can not refrain again from expressing the opinion that 1120 bills that were actually passed is about 800 bills too many. We still suffer in this country from an overdose of legislation, and I wish much that the voters next December would make polite suggestions to their assemblymen and to their senators that they will give them a good conduct mark in proportion to the smallness of the number of bills that they introduce.

Eleven hundred and twenty bills, think of it, have come to my desk for executive action and during the past two weeks I have acted on practically all of them, all except about a dozen. The present count shows that I have approved about 770 of them and vetoed about 350 of them. This is a greater use of the executive veto power than that used by any former Governor in this history of our State, but even with this large number of vetoes on my part, the State this year is adding nearly 800 new laws to the statute books. I think that is a lot too many.

It is my thought that at least half of the bills that I have felt I had to approve could have been eliminated if the Legislature had made simple amendments to the general laws, thus eliminating a very large number of private or local bills, and giving the control of wholly minor subjects to administrative officers of government under the State government or under city or county or town governments. This would preserve the principle of home rule and at the same time make action by the Legislature unnecessary in hundreds of cases each year.

Now let me summarize a resume of the more important things that the Legislature actually did do—twelve fairly brief resumes of legislation.

1. I place first of all in importance the passage of the bill creating the Power Authority to develop the State owned water power on the St. Lawrence River. It is my earnest hope that this is the forerunner of cheaper electricity for the homes and farms and small business people of the State.

2. The Legislature took the first steps to carry out the new prison policy of the State, such as authorizing the machinery for classifying and segregating different types of prisoners, appropriating money for the medium security prison and restoring the premium for good behavior in the prisons. I am sorry though that the Legislature, through a disagreement between the two Houses, did not change the mandatory life term for fourth offenders, without regard to what the offences were.

3. The Legislature recognized the new State policy of utilization of land. This involves continuing the land survey covering the whole State; it involves the program for reforestation of idle lands, and the beginning of the elimination of the poorer land from agriculture altogether.

4. A part, only a part, of the fine health program was adopted and the State will start to build this year the first of the three new regional tuberculosis sanatoria, covering a great many counties in the central and western part of the State.

5. The Legislature took two small steps toward the better regulation of public utilities, for they passed a bill to place bus lines under the control of the Public Service Commission, and another bill to place private water companies also under the control of the Public Service Commission.

6. The Legislature used the first \$20,000,000 of the bond issue that was voted last fall, for the State institutions' building program and they added \$10,000,000 to this from general revenues. The result is that we are starting this year \$20,000,000 more of new hospitals for the insane and \$10,000,000 more of new prison facilities. This is carrying out the five year program which I suggested and proposed two years ago, and we are keeping faith with the people of the State with the purpose and object of having complete facilities for patients and prisoners having those facilities in actual operation by the year 1935.

7. After five long years of talking and turmoil the Legislature at last has given the necessary authority for the unification of the Rapid Transit system in the five boroughs that make up New York City. Now it will become possible for all of these facilities to be tied together in a practical operating whole, with the hope, of course, that nearly all of us have, that the five cent fare can be retained for the nearly 7,000,000 people in the greater city.

8. After two years of negotiation with the New Jersey authorities, we have made it possible to consolidate the Hudson Tunnel, which has been in very successful operation for several years, with the other projects of the Port Authority, thus assuring uniform tolls in this tunnel and in the 38th Street tunnel and on the new Washington bridge across the Hudson River. Incidentally, by refinancing the money which the State put into the Hudson Tunnel during a long course of former years, the treasury of the State has received \$24,000,000.

9. In line with this same effort to cooperate with other States, the Legislature authorized the appointment of a Commission to study the question of the pollution of the beaches of Long Island, of the New York and Connecticut shore line and of the New Jersey shore, this commission working with similar commissions set up by our sister states of Connecticut and New Jersey. This will tie in with the work of the new Sanitation Department of New York City and in a few years I think should result in a clean and sanitary ocean front, not only along the ocean shores that belong to the State of New York but also those beaches on the shore of Connecticut and the beaches on the shore of New Jersey which especially of late have been made unsanitary and very dirty because of a great deal of refuse and garbage and other stuff that has floated up on those beaches from the City of New York itself.

10. The Legislature authorized also a new Commission to investigate the whole subject of unemployment and this Commission will, I am confident, also study and report on the suggestions heretofore made in regard to unemployment insurance. I may add that the Governors of New York and six other States in this neighborhood have cooperated very well and all of the States are making with us a joint study of unemployment insurance. We hope that something practical, that something safe and sound can be

worked out along this line so that in the event in the days to come we pass through another period of depression like this one, the real suffering and the real want and the depression itself will not be nearly as serious as the period we are now going through.

11. A very definite step forward was taken by the Legislature in passing amendments to the law protecting women in industry, something that we have been fighting for in the State for many years and now we have,—a statute which comes very close to providing for an enforceable forty-eight hour week, together with a half holiday every week for working women.

12. Finally, the Legislature has undertaken an investigation of governmental conditions in the City of New York and the two appropriations to carry this out have been approved by me. The total of them is one-half a million dollars.

On the whole, therefore, this session of the Legislature that lasted over three months can be called by no means barren of accomplishments. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of many of the measures that I have just talked about they were hurried through the Legislature during the closing days and even during the closing hours of the session. I think it is a fact that the Legislature passed or killed more bills, many of them of a very important character, in the rush hours of the closing week than they did in the whole previous three months of the session. Now you and I know that no business could be successfully conducted in this way. It is my hope that at the next session the new Legislature will take some very definite steps to remedy and improve their own thoroughly unbusinesslike methods. That is not a new complaint of Governors, nor is it any attempt on my part to usurp the privileges and prerogatives of the legislative branch of the government. But if the Legislature wants to conduct its business in an inefficient way, the way they have done all through my life, the Governor has nothing to say, but the people of the State have a lot to say about it. They have a real right to demand more businesslike methods and have a right to demand a much freer discussion and debate on important measures than obtains today under the methods of this Legislature or its predecessors. The people of the State have a right to demand more businesslike methods on the part of the Legislature.

Now I suppose it is fair to look at the other side of the picture—in other words, the things which this Legislature ought to have done and failed to do. There are a few which I have listed here—all of them that I have spoken of before which I will go through very briefly.

1. The Legislature, outside of the bus and water company bills, did absolutely nothing to strengthen the control of the State over public utilities. Even the very weak recommendations of the majority of the legislative committee which reported a year ago, even they have not been carried out and there seems to be on the part of the majority a complete disregard in those legislative halls of the real need of strengthening the hands of the Public Service Commission, and of giving to the commission the proper tools with which to meet new problems which have come up during the last few years by mergers, holding companies and other devices on the part of the utility companies. In the last analysis, of course, it is only the people of the State who suffer from this lack of power on the part of the Public Service Commission. You and I as citizens are paying in some form or another every day of our lives for the lack of teeth in the laws that are supposed to protect us. For this the legislative leaders alone are to blame.

2. Purely local political considerations prevented the Legislature from even authorizing a commission to study the broad subject of the reorganization of local government. I am convinced—and more and more people every day are convinced—that while the federal and state governments are operating on a fairly efficient business basis, the great governmental waste today lies in local government, in city and town and county government. This is where the great bulk of our taxes goes to; that is where tax savings can be most readily made. Let me give you just one example. Under a very old law in our State the supervisors—one in each of the 940 towns of the State, get a rake-off, a 1 per cent fee for school building moneys contributed by Albany

to the local school districts. All the supervisor has to do is to deposit one check received from Albany and draw another check, and for this important service he gets 1 per cent of the amount of the check for himself. He does not even have to do all of that. In many cases, all he has to do is to sign his name on the back of the check and turn it over to somebody else. Some supervisors get several thousand dollars in a year for this small act and they have no further responsibility for the expenditure of the money. A bill to cut off this 1 per cent fee failed of passage in the Legislature, but if it had passed there would have been a saving to the taxpayers of the State amounting to over \$130,000 each year. Political influence on the part of local politicians was responsible for the defeat of that bill, but the real blame lay with the members of the Assembly and Senate in listening to this political influence and in failing to have the courage to put through this big saving for the taxpayers and ending this rake-off for the supervisors of the towns.

3. Although the splendid commission of doctors, educators and laymen headed by President Fairland of Cornell University, recommended the establishment of county health units throughout the State, the majority leaders in the Legislature absolutely declined to pass the bill. Here again purely local political influence made itself felt. Every county in the State would have saved money by the establishment of a county health unit and at the same time the health of the villages and towns of our State would have been vastly improved, and so we have to wait for another year and hope then that local partisan political influence will not have the same results here in Albany.

4. In spite of a tremendous demand from millions of people in every part of the State the majority leaders declined to take any steps whatsoever to give further immediate protection to thrift accounts in the State banks. There are nearly two million depositors in these thrift accounts and nearly all of these depositors feel that these thrift accounts are really savings accounts and ought to be safeguarded by State law in much the same way that savings accounts are today guarded in savings banks. But all that the Legislature did was to ask a committee to investigate and report another year. In view of the fact that the Legislature had all the necessary facts and data for studying the subject for two whole years past, it seems almost a dereliction of duty on the part of the legislators that they have deferred this great and important reform for another twelve months.

5. For a long time—five whole years in fact—we have had no legislative reapportionment, even though it is called for by the Constitution. The majority leaders made absolutely no effort even to report out of committee an apportionment bill for senators and assemblymen, even though I begged them to come down and talk it over with me. I knew if they would do that, we would agree on a constitutional bill. There is a grave injustice at the present time towards hundreds of thousands of our citizens. Some districts contain three and four and five times as many inhabitants and voters as other senate or assembly districts and the effect is an inequality of representation which is certainly not in accord with our principles of government. The Legislature made one startling change over former procedure when they attempted to reapportion the congressional districts by a joint resolution instead of by a bill that would come to the Governor. There is a grave question of course as to the constitutionality of this procedure and it will have to be decided ultimately by the Court of Appeals. But it is worth noting that some strange things were done in this congressional reapportionment.

6. Some congressional districts only have 210,000 inhabitants and others have nearly 350,000. Certainly that is not the intent of the Congress or of the Constitution of our State. For instance, the majority leaders put Suffolk county, at the easterly end of Long Island, into the same congressional district with Staten Island, which is at the westerly end of Long Island, thus leaving a long gap of land and sea between the two parts of this district, and in that gap are situated a number of other congressional districts. Although the whole State has been shocked by the conduct of some of our judges the Legislature wholly failed to pass two bills which I considered of great importance to the integrity of the judiciary. The first of these was a bill to prevent judges from engaging in private business, and it seems to me that is a per-

fectly logical and proper measure. The second was a bill to prevent public officers from claiming immunity if called upon to testify in regard to their official conduct, and that seems to me a perfectly proper measure. Both of these bills were approved in principle by the leaders of both political parties, and yet by one of those strange circumstances which cannot always be explained, neither bill got past the Legislature in the closing days.

7. The Legislature wholly failed to provide for the continuation of the Governor's Committee on Stabilization of Industry and Relief of the Emergency of Unemployment. There is nothing I can do about it but I am asking the members of this committee to continue to serve unofficially and without funds for expenses during the coming year, and I hope we can raise the money from private sources to carry on this important work. The committee has done fine work for unemployment relief and the only reason for the failure of the Legislature to give the committee official standing must be the fear of letting me have any credit for the relief of unemployment.

8. The Legislature for an equally unexplained reason failed to do anything to regulate employment agencies through a State agency. Everyone who has studied the subject believes that grave abuses have existed in some employment agencies in the State and there is no reason why they should not come under State regulation.

9. Equally unexplainable was the failure of the Legislature to provide a special bureau in the Department of Labor for the enforcement of the eight-hour day, the enforcement of the prevailing rate of wages law, and the enforcement of the citizens preference law, giving preference to New York State citizens in employment.

10. Once again, a Legislature has adjourned without taking any action on the four-year term for Governor proposal with elections held halfway between presidential years. All I have asked them to do for the past three years was to submit this proposition to the voters by referendum, but apparently the legislative leaders are afraid to do even that.

11. Once again, also, the Legislature has declined to enact changes in the election law so as to take certain political and partisan elements out of it. They declined to extend the rule of bi-partisan boards of election to five whole counties which now have boards controlled wholly by one party. They declined to require the publication of campaign contributions before election day,—that is when the publication counts, and they declined to do anything to get quicker returns of elections from out of the way places. Here once more, I am afraid, the element of mere partisanship has controlled.

This then constitutes the summary of legislative action during the past three months. I certainly cannot be truthful in saying that the session was a brilliant success from the point of view of the inhabitants of the State of New York; nor would it be fair to me to say that the Legislature has done nothing. It is my constant hope that as the years go by we shall have, first of all, an improvement in the actual methods of handling proposed legislation—a fairer and freer discussion on important measures, the elimination of a great deal of outworn, time-wasting machinery, and the application of less partisanship in the consideration of bills into which partisanship ought not to enter at all.

I have a little sigh of relief in knowing that some two hundred members of the Legislature have safely gone home. I hope that no emergency will make it necessary for me to call them together in special session between now and the first of next January. I hope, too, that all of the members of the Senate and the Assembly will have a happy vacation during the next eight months.

I myself hope, after another week, of cleaning things up here in Albany to take a holiday too but it will only be for a very few weeks, and I shall then be back on the job in Albany around the first of June. At that time I shall have the whole of the summer before me and I expect to do as I have done the two previous summers, to travel through practically every county of the State, visiting State institutions, parks and other projects, going to as many different communities as possible and getting away also as much as possible from the atmosphere of party politics, which I do not believe is a very necessary atmosphere for a Governor to be in except possibly during the months of the legislative session.

ADDRESSES

727

Many of you who are listening to my voice I shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting during the course of the coming summer and in the meantime I am very glad to have had this chance of talking to you and I shall hope to see you very soon. Many thanks and goodnight.

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