
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Radio Address on Completion of U.S. Route 1

Radio Address from Albany to Cheraw, South Carolina,
September 17, 1931

Completion of United States Highway No. 1

There are three reasons why I so greatly regret my inability to be present in person at the celebration in Cheraw, South Carolina, in honor of the completion of the through paving of United States Highway Number 1.

The first is a purely personal ground, for I had greatly looked forward to the possibility of meeting many of my old friends in South Carolina. Since I have been spending so much of my time in Georgia during the past few years I have come into close contact with the interests and problems of the people of the Southeast. In the old days of course, when I was in the Navy Department, I used to pay many delightful visits to Charleston and Port Royal, and felt very grateful for the splendid interest which the people of South Carolina took in the upbuilding and maintenance of the United States Navy.

I would be with you at Cheraw in person today were it not for a very important matter which is being considered by the Legislature of the State of New York in Albany. As in so many other parts of the country, the State of New York faces a great responsibility in doing all that it can to relieve suffering and need caused by the economic depression. The overwhelming majority of the people in my State are anxious that the solution of this problem be carried out without partisanship or the seeking of political advantage in order that the State may give all possible and proper assistance to its citizens. That, I know, is the thought and purpose of the average citizen not only in my own State, but in every other State in which a similar problem exists.

The second reason for my disappointment in not being with you is based on the historic importance of today's celebration. You are acting on behalf of the Thirteen Original States of our Union, with Maine and Florida thrown in for good measure.

If you were to search the map of the United States you could not find a more historic through highway than Route No. 1. Its whole length from North to South is packed every mile with the memories and traditions of our colonial days, of the wars for our independence, and with important events in the building and later growth of the republic.

P. 767

The new availability of this great highway throughout its length, in good weather and in bad, to the ever increasing army of Americans who travel by motor, means a deeper understanding of and greater interest in the fundamentals of our history. It is all very well for us to read of our history and growth along governmental and economic and educational and scientific lines, but it is far more realistic and far more useful to learn each history, at least in part, through the eye, in addition to through the ear. In the olden days, a century and more ago, it was the custom among the richer people of the United States to send their sons to Europe to make what was known as "the grand tour." This trip covering all of the important historic spots of the old Continent was intended as the rounding-out of the knowledge of history. I hope that this completion of United States Route No. 1 from now on will give to Americans from every section of the country—east, west, north and south—the opportunity of taking a new kind of grand tour, with the purpose of seeing at first hand the scenes where the greater part of our colonial and national history were laid. May I express the hope also that the various states and the various localities by concerted action will place adequate markers and provide adequate literature so that he who travels may drink in the actual history of these earlier days.

The third reason for my disappointment in not being with you in person is that I should have liked to emphasize to you face to face the importance which I attach to a greater and deeper understanding of the common problems which we face today. No man or woman who lives in New England or New York, no matter how diligently they may read, can get a true mental picture of the Southland unless they have visited the Southland in person—unless they get to know their neighbors in other parts of the country. The same thought holds true for those who live in the Southland, for unless they see at first hand the problems of their fellow Americans in New York and New England, they cannot fully appreciate the common national needs.

I remember once upon a time a visit to the White House when a cousin of mine was living there. We noticed that he was much disturbed. We finally asked him what the trouble was and he said with much feeling "If I were President and Congress too, I would pass a bill or an amendment to the Constitution which would make it absolutely obligatory, in order to become a candidate for the House of Representatives or the United States Senate, to file a certificate that one had traveled at least once into every state of the Union." He was thinking along the line that sectionalism and a lack of knowledge of other parts of the country result in bickerings and in a failure to understand the great obvious needs of the rest of the country, and that it would be better to become acquainted with the thought and needs of every part of the land. It was with the same idea in mind that I have taken so much satisfaction in attending the annual conference of the Governors of the several states (and, by the way, one of the most delightful recollections I have is of meeting the Governor of South Carolina this past June in Indiana).

In these conferences we Governors are sometimes inclined to try to talk politics, but I think most of us realize that these conferences are not for political purposes, but rather to enable us to obtain a first-hand knowledge of what is going on in other states. That is the true advantage of having Executives of one state meet those of the other states.

Almost every state problem has its national aspects. We all know that whether it be the cotton problem or wheat problem or the problem of the use of natural resources of the country, such as water power, forests, etc., it does not mean that the solution must be worked out by the Federal Government alone.

I am a better man and I hope a better citizen for having had the privilege of living so much in Georgia. I am a better man and I hope a better citizen for having had the opportunity of traveling first and last and on many occasions into every part of the country, for having talked and corresponded with men and women in every state and of every political faith.

I am often amused and annoyed by people who come to me and say "Is not this the only great question before the American people today?" or "Is not that the one solution of our troubles?" There is no definite "this" or "that." There are dozens of "thises" and "thats."

We are living in a civilization that is built up on an orderly development of government, based in the first instance on the old town meeting—where a group of citizens could get together and talk things over, and run their local government affairs. From that there grew towns and counties and from the groups of towns and counties along the seaboard grew the Colonies that developed into the states, and today we know that the sovereignty of the states is the foundation of the Union itself.

The Federal Government as it exists today expresses the sovereignty of the 48 states. These states constitute 48 laboratories of modern government in which we are seeking to work out the problems of today and of the future. That is why it is of such importance that these laboratories be conducted along progressive lines. Through this laboratory method we shall occasionally find disappointment and failure, but on the whole by using this method we are going to work out new solutions for new problems. With the working out of new solutions in some of these laboratories, those that are successful can be and will be applied to all the other states.

We must remember also that the Federal Government only has such power as is delegated to it by the several states. Many of our new problems can best be solved by federal jurisdiction and yet I am very certain that in the days to come nothing can be bettered by a fundamental change of the theory government which was set up in the year 1789.

In the matter of cooperation let us go all the way.

It is a fine thing that this Route No. 1 has been built through the efforts and cooperation of 15 of the states. It is true that the Federal Government has given certain funds towards its completion, and yet the real work and the real pride rests primarily in the citizens of these 15 states. I hope the time will come in the very near future when I can make a trip starting from the northernmost end in Maine, going clear through to Key West. A large part of this route I have traveled over in the past years. I have visited most of the historic spots of the coast along most of its length, and I am very happy that today the people of the United States as a whole have an opportunity of using this splendid stretch of road.

To you in South Carolina, and to the others who have come from various states of the Union, from almost every section of the country, I extend my congratulations. I wish I were with you today. I can only tell you that I believe that your work will result in great good, not alone on our own Atlantic seaboard, but in every part of the Union.

Thank you for giving me the privilege of talking to you today. Just as soon as my Legislature lets me I am going South again.