
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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**Poughkeepsie, NY -
Election Eve Talk on Amendments**

Nov 3, 1931

I want to say a few words about tomorrow's election. In saying them, I address not merely this audience gathered here in Poughkeepsie, but all the voters of the State. What I shall have to say is spoken in an entirely non-partisan spirit, without any regard to party plans or party advantage. I speak as the Governor of all the people in this State to all voters as citizens. I speak primarily of the duty and privilege that citizenship offers you on this election day, November 3, 1931.

This is described as an off year, but that is a faulty term, for in fact there are no off years in the business of government and there should not be any off years in the voter's attention

to the public business. Government is never well run unless the citizens give it their constant attention.

In fact a year such as this offers an unusual opportunity to the intelligent voter. There is not so much of the red fire that goes with an election in which there is a long list of candidates for State or National office and, therefore, the voter has a better chance to look at candidates for local office critically from the standpoint of what they have done and what they propose to do. This is a good year in which to organize our minds calmly and to sift men and policies.

My first word of advice and my most insistent plea is this: VOTE. Prove that you are a citizen and not just selfish.

If you are a thinking citizen, you'll find plenty on the ballot and the voting machines worth your most earnest attention -- questions that will test your ability to think clearly on elementary matters of government. So if you have a vote, go to the polls tomorrow and cast it according to your best and most sincere judgment. By all means VOTE.

Realizing that for these few moments I am speaking intimately to thousands of groups gathered in their own homes, I want to add a few words about your vote tomorrow. I think we ought to concentrate much attention on our lists of candidates for local offices. We know something about these men. We ought to know a great deal about them, especially about the men who are now holding public

office. Let us consider whether they have been working in our interest. Have they run our affairs on a business basis? Have they been alert to keep taxes down in this time when economy is so necessary? Have they been vigilant to maintain a high standard of public service? If they have not, then we ought to consider whether we cannot do better by choosing someone else better qualified, someone who offers reasonable promise of being more faithful and efficient.

As a citizen you have the interests of yourself and your neighbors to consider. It is your duty to hold your employees in public office to a high standard. That is the only way we can get better government.

But besides candidates for the assembly and candidates for local offices, there are questions of state policy to be decided tomorrow in the form of proposed amendments to the State Constitution. I discussed these amendments a week ago in a radio address. I want to review them again tonight.

I shall take them in order as they come on the ballot.

Amendment No. 1 will eliminate the necessity of holding a state census in 1935. It will save the State a great and wholly unnecessary expense. VOTE YES.

Amendment No. 2 I have labelled "dangerous and wholly indefensible". The Constitution now forbids a member of the Legislature from receiving any civil appointment while still a

member. This provision is a safeguard against the worst forms of log-rolling -- of trading votes for office. The amendment would remove this safeguard. I hope it will be decisively defeated.

Amendment No. 3 is the reforestation amendment. I regard it as one of the most important matters of state policy that has come before you for many years and I urge you to vote "Yes" upon it. Its adoption in my well-considered judgment will be a thoroughly constructive, forward-looking step on the part of the voters of this State, a sign that our people have faith in our State and have the courage and good sense to plan intelligently for the future. In a nut shell this amendment will turn a state liability into a state asset. It will save money to the thirteen million people

in the cities and on the farms of the State.

The amendment provides for the use of abandoned idle farm land in the State for the purpose of growing trees where none grow now. It is because I believe that the proper use of our land area is vital to the present prosperity of the State that I am so insistently urging the passage of this amendment. It represents one thing that we can do, one very small investment, -- a plan of partial insurance against future depressions.

We have about four million acres of abandoned farm lands in the State. The area of this abandoned land is increasing at the rate of a quarter million acres a year. It stands as a complete economic waste and a burden, too. If there were nothing that could be done with this land, we wouldn't need to concern ourselves about

it. But there is something that can be done. Nearly all of it will grow forest trees. Most of it is well suited to that purpose and the experience of European nations over hundreds of years has shown that tree planting saves money to the community. We have used our timber resources as if they were a mine-- from which the ore can be taken once and once only. The United States as ^a whole is now using timber four times as fast as it is being grown. In New York State statistics prove we are using it twenty times as fast as we are growing it. Nearly all our supply is being hauled across the continent at a cost of forty million dollars a year for freight, and even that expensive business can't last forever.

The amendment was approved by the Legislature of 1930 and again by the Legislature of 1931. During the whole of these two years practically not a single voice in any part of the State was raised against the amendment. The sentiment for it was substantially unanimous. It should be gratifying, I think, to every citizen of the State to know that it was passed on a strictly non-partisan basis and has the support of leaders of both parties in the Legislature.

Two things will be accomplished by it. First, it sets up a schedule of small appropriations over a period of eleven years and in doing this we are in fact carrying out just what the Friedsam

Act has done for state aid to education over a period of years. The principal difference is that this state aid to localities for education is over one hundred times as big as the cost of reforestation next year.

Why an eleven year plan? Just for the same reason that we passed the Friedsam Act to give an increasing amount of state aid for education over a definite period of years. We wanted to plan for a better educational system and we knew that if we started and skipped a year, the result would be wasteful and wreck the whole plan. In the same way reforesting abandoned farm lands calls for a continuing program. Already the State is growing the tiny trees

from seed. This calls for gathering the seed, planting it in especially prepared beds, transplanting the little trees after they come up, and then in many cases transplanting them again before they are finally set out in the abandoned pastures and brush land. Can you see what would happen to a reforestation program if we had to close up the nurseries for a single year? It would be just as if the State or the locality were to turn away all children of say ten years old for a full school year, making them run wild without supervision or without instruction. Of course, anyone who knows anything about the growing of trees and the pressing economic need for growing trees understands why continuing appropriations are

necessary.

But I want to stress also the simple fact that reforestation will employ hundreds of people who are out of work - that is something to be seriously considered at this time.

If this amendment fails to pass, many hundreds of people cannot be put to work. This applies not merely to unemployed people in the farming districts, because many of our nurseries are located close to large centers of population and employ a great many from those communities.

Remember too that this abandoned land and the trees which will grow on it will always belong to the people of the State. We can get nowhere in taking any progressive step in government unless

we assume that later on the state government will continue to be honestly administered for the benefit of the average citizen.

Yes, ~~But~~ the ^{big} ~~main~~ point to remember is that this amendment is not only for future economic good, but for immediate economic good. It will help to cut government cost right away, because these areas that need to be reforested cost money to govern at the present time and bring in no return. I am very clear that by it we shall not only add greatly to the future wealth of the State, but that we shall make immediate savings to the taxpayers as a whole which will more than balance this small program. It is one of the rather rare investments which is not only safe but will yield immediate profits.

Don't let anyone be deceived about the safety of the Adirondack or Catskill Parks. It is enough for me to point out that without exception every great civic organization in this State, *Ad. L. Soc., Grange, Farmers Union, etc. Pres. Ad. Soc.* whether in up-State New York or in New York City, has come out wholeheartedly in favor of the amendment. The sound judgment of these public-spirited citizens carefully arrived at over a period of two years should be a sufficient guarantee of the soundness of the undertaking. *For fear being a menace to Ad. Park*

I ask your affirmative support of Amendment No. 3.

Amendment No. 4 proposes to cut in two the present Second Judicial District, now made up of the counties of Kings, Queens,

Nassau, Suffolk and Richmond--in other words, all of Long Island and Staten Island. There are now nine judicial districts in the State for our 12,750,000 people, but the Second district has a population of four and a quarter million people. From the standpoint of equalizing population in the districts and of preventing any one district becoming top-heavy with judges there is much to be said in favor of this amendment, but I will say frankly that I intend to vote against it because of the notorious circumstance that a great deal of politics has been played in relation to the amendment and in making up the slates of candidates for the Supreme Court in the district.

Amendment No. 5, which would change the name of the State Department of Charities to the Department of Social Welfare, I regard as wholly proper and I hope it will pass without opposition.

Amendment No. 6, the last of the group, would create a central board of assessors for Westchester County and eliminate a great number of local assessors. I believe the general principle of consolidating local offices is sound, but I think this is a local matter which properly belongs to the people of Westchester County to decide. I have given public notice that if it is disapproved by the voters of Westchester County themselves in the election, I shall next winter veto any act of the Legislature which compels Westchester

County to set up this centralized board of assessors against the will of the County itself.

If you want a simple rule when you vote tomorrow, let me put it this way. Whatever you do about the other amendments, vote YES on constitutional amendments 1, 3 and 5. These are the constructive amendments which in my judgment should receive the hearty support of the voters of the State. Remember Numbers 1, 3 and 5.

Whatever your choice of candidates may be, let us all take part tomorrow in the highest privilege which our citizenship gives to us Americans.

Radio Address, Columbus Institute, Poughkeepsie, November 2, 1931

Asking the Voters of the State to Support the Proposed Constitutional Amendments Abolishing the State Census, Changing the Name of the State Charities Department and the Reforestation Amendment

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