
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 479

1932 June 9

**Albany, NY - Radio Address -
"Cost of State Government" Pt. 1**

Radio Address, Albany, June 9, 1932

THE COST OF STATE GOVERNMENT

No man in public office today can fail to realize the demand and need for lower taxes. He knows that business, industry and agriculture are straining under a tax load heavier than they can safely bear. He knows that high taxes are one cause of unemployment.

While recognizing these things, the man in public office also knows the facts of government. Taxes grow out of expenditures; expenditures spring from services; services result from the commands of the people, in the form of laws passed by the Legislature directing and instructing the administrative branch of the government what to do. If taxes are too high it means too many services have been authorized or that particular services are costing too much. If taxes are to be reduced, services must be curtailed or eliminated. That is plain. It is also clear that services can be eliminated or curtailed—not by passionate oratory, not by resolutions, not by blanket criticisms of budgets or officials—but only by new instructions from the people through the Legislature in the form of new laws or the repeal of old laws. Under our plan of government those new instructions are the direct product of public opinion.

When I became Governor four years ago, I announced that from time to time I would report to the people the essential facts relating to their State government. I want the people to know the purposes for which their tax dollars are being levied, appropriated and spent. This is the first of a series of radio talks analyzing the cost of the New York State government. Others will follow during the next three months. Our aim will be to place before you every fact bearing on State appropriations and expenditures, wholly divorced from personal or political opinions. We believe that the people of the State can and will, when given the facts, decide intelligently and correctly whether new instructions shall be issued to their officials.

Think of it, if you will, in terms of purchasing. If the housewife, going about her daily marketing, is compelled by lack of funds to spend less money, she begins to scan the family menu, the laundry bill, the cost of clothing, and the like, to determine which she will reduce and which she will stop buying. Similarly you taxpayers go to market with a long list of public services to purchase. You too must scan the list and decide which you will buy, how much you will purchase, and which you will do without. To help you in deciding this, we will compare the nature, quantity and quality of your public service purchases of 10 years ago with those of today.

Tonight, let us look at the Executive Department. You may think of it as the Governor's office only. While that would have been true 10 years ago, it is not so today. This is because when the State government was reorganized pursuant to the constitutional amendment adopted in 1925, there was transferred to and put under it the departments of Military and Naval Affairs, State Police, Standards and Purchase, Parole, Budget, and the County Army Fund.

p. 515

It is true that the cost of the department has increased, as for example in the case of

STATE POLICE

In fact, of the total increase in the Executive Department, more than 65 per cent is due to State Police. This force of 232 officers and men was established in 1917. By 1922 it had grown to 372, and now consists of 666. Within the last 10 years, the duties of the State Police have been greatly enlarged. In addition to their old duties, they are now required to enforce the Motor Vehicle Law on the public highways, supply police protection in State parks, and prevent gambling and obscene shows at country fairs, and many other things. The people through their legislative representatives have issued these mandates.

That the force is performing more work is manifest when I say that last year they patrolled four times as many miles of highway; made $4\frac{1}{2}$ times as many arrests; conducted twice as many investigations, and collected more than twice as much in fines.

In 1922, privates were paid \$900, captains \$2,400 a year. In the last 10 years the Legislature revised upward the salary schedule. The private starts at \$900 but receives a yearly-increment of \$200 for the first five years of service. Captains are paid \$4,600. Furthermore, last year a teletypewriter system was installed, which greatly increases the efficiency of the force but adds \$147,000 to the expenses.

Put quite simply, the question is: Do you want that force reduced to the 1922 number and the salary schedule to the 1922 level? If that is done, and the teletypewriter system is abandoned, approximately \$1,400,000 will be saved. Should that course be followed it will be necessary to repeal the laws requiring the State Police to enforce the Motor Vehicle Law, furnish police protection in State parks, and the supervision of country fairs.

The next largest increase occurred in the cost of maintaining five institutions under the

DIVISION OF STANDARDS AND PURCHASE

These institutions are a School for the Blind at Batavia, one for Indian children at Iroquois, the Woman's Relief Corps Home at Oxford, a Training School for Girls at Hudson, and an Industrial School for Boys at Industry. The cost of these institutions has increased because more pupils are being taught or more inmates cared for. Moreover, we like to think we are educating and taking care of them better than we did 10 years ago. Furthermore, the average wage paid officers and employees in these five institutions in 1922 was \$900—now it is \$1,200. Frankly, the questions facing us are these:

Do we wish to reduce the inmate population?

Shall we deny education to the blind and to Indian children?

Shall we withhold support from the widows of veterans?

Shall we neglect to receive at Hudson and Industry girls and boys committed to those institutions by the courts?

Shall we reduce from \$1,200 to \$900 the average salary paid to officers and employees in these institutions and schools?

If those instructions are given to the Legislature and to the Governor, approximately \$336,000 will be saved.

Next we come to the

COUNTY ARMORY FUND

Although treated as a part of the State budget the maintenance of armories is not in fact a State expense. The State acts merely as the clearing-house for the two brigade districts into which it is divided, the cost of maintaining armories in each district being chargeable against the counties within that district.

To reduce armory maintenance costs to the 1922 level, thereby saving about \$460,000, will require—

(a) The repeal of the law increasing the compensation of armory employees \$1 per day.

(b) The abandonment of new armories established within this period at Peekskill and Ticonderoga, and the armory reopened at Rome.

(c) The rescinding by the War Department of its 1924 order designating infantry units at Newburgh, Kingston, Middletown, Poughkeepsie, Mount Vernon and Peekskill to be the 156th Field Artillery. Expenses of artillery units run considerably higher than for infantry units.

(d) Abandoning the two new armories constructed in Utica and Oneida.

(e) Reducing necessary repairs and replacements to armories having an average life of 35 years to the 1922 level.

Then we come to the

DIVISION OF PAROLE

Until 1930 the State had no adequate parole system. It spent a meagre sum and the parole work of the State was supplemented with private endeavor. Four times, between 1929 and 1930, was the parole system investigated. In one report it was described as "an under-financed moral gesture." President Hoover's Wickersham Committee describes the new parole system as the "most comprehensive plan for a state parole department devised at a single stroke by any state in the Union."

The cost of this work is necessarily greater than it was 10 years ago—approximately \$380,000 to be exact. But the expenditure of this additional sum saves the State considerably more. It costs to supervise a parolee \$80 per year; to maintain him in prison would cost \$450. So, you see, the State saves \$370 annually for each prisoner placed on parole. As there are 7,000 of these, the annual saving exceeds \$2,500,000 for maintenance alone. To build new prisons to house these 7,000 parolees would cost another twenty to twenty-five millions at least.

I doubt if anyone would suggest that we revert to the 1922 plan but if that were done, the budget could be reduced \$384,000. Such action would, however, increase other appropriations considerably more.

Coming now to the

DIVISION ON MILITARY AND NAVAL AFFAIRS

it is found that the cost of this agency is several hundreds of thousands of dollars less than 10 years ago. That requires no comment.

In the

DIVISION OF STANDARDS AND PURCHASE

we find no increase in cost.

The central purchasing plan became effective July 1, 1922, pursuant to legislation enacted that year. While the cost of the central purchasing department is no greater today than it was during the first year of its establishment, it is making or supervising the making of purchases involving five times the amount of 1922. The savings, I am content, amount to a few million dollars yearly.

There remain

THE EXECUTIVE CHAMBER AND THE DIVISION OF THE BUDGET

Neither of these agencies show anything more than a normal increase in cost when it is recalled that constitutional amendments transferred to the Executive Department functions not theretofore belonging to it, and brought into existence the executive budget. You will readily understand that as the State grows in population and activities, more work just naturally flows to the Governor's office.

From an examination of the work of just this one department do you not begin to see the definite questions which the people, the Legislature, and the Governor must answer if we are to economize intelligently in the interest of lower taxes? We can and must make reductions in the actual cost of operating the government. I have put into effect, last year and this, policies resulting in very substantial savings, but bear in mind that the greatest

saving can be made only by abandoning altogether or in part actual functions of government which the Legislature has required in past years. That is our problem today.

Next week we will examine another department—the Department of Agriculture and Markets. In the meantime, all the facts relating to the Executive Department can be obtained from the station to which you are listening, in case you want to examine them yourself and encourage the discussion of them in the various organizations to which you belong—a thing which I am earnestly hopeful will be done.
