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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**File No. 491**

**1932 August ?**

**Albany, NY -  
Veto Message for Wicks Bill  
(not used)**

*Not approved*

*1915 message prepared in  
case Nichols bill passed  
unamended - just used  
because they consented to  
local spirit come down and  
conflict*

This bill misses entirely the ~~purpose~~<sup>outlined</sup> of emergency relief. The program which I had ~~outlined~~<sup>outlined</sup> would provide an independent, enthusiastic, and flexible administration ~~AA~~  
~~AA~~ which would actually relieve by providing state moneys where ~~AA~~ most needed as a supplement to local resources. Instead of that there is set up a bureaucratic routine administration, charged only with handing out state money without limit and without discretion, in proportion to the amount which the localities raise. The bill clearly provides that the richer the locality, the more state money it will get, and that the poorer the locality, the less state money it will get. This absurd result is made even worse by the fact that no one can even guess how much money it will cost the state. As soon as a city appropriates some money the state must give it forty or fifty per cent of that amount. Even this is not all. Under Section 14, private charitable contributions may be turned over to <sup>a</sup> the city, and the state will then have to give the city forty or fifty per cent of that amount <sup>in addition</sup>. Where will it end? One or more wealthy cities may provide quickly, by public and private means, so much money that practically the whole of the \$20,000,000 will be exhausted without helping the rest of the state. Now I have no objection to spending ~~more~~<sup>as much</sup> than \$20,000,000, if it is necessary. But some one has to pay for the excess over \$20,000,000. The Legislature has glibly forgotten to provide any additional money. I believe that \$20,000,000, if distributed sensibly <sup>and ratably in accordance with relative actual needs</sup> will be sufficient for the present, and I have recommended a tax which will raise that amount. The legislature, however, apparently believes that there should be no limit whatsoever; but has not bothered with the mere detail as to where the money is to come from.

One need not be an expert in finance to know that such a bill is merely a blank-check, payable by the state,



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which will come back eventually marked "insufficient funds". This bill not only in spirit, but in terms, lifts the responsibility of taking care of the needy from the shoulders of local government and private charity, where it rightfully and historically belongs, and places it squarely on the shoulders of the state, where it ~~belongs~~ <sup>only it and where local and private funds flow in sufficient</sup> belongs. In fact, I am informed that it was urged on the floor of the Senate in support of this bill that one of its chief merits lies in this shift of burden.

It is a dangerous and uneconomical shift. It will discourage local and private effort. It will enable municipalities and private wealth, able and originally willing to assume their full share of the burden, to sit back and conveniently call on the state to carry one-half of the burden.

My program contemplated no such thing. It rested on what I consider a fundamental - that charity is the duty of the private individuals and local municipalities. I recommended that the state step in <sup>at</sup> this time of urgent need not to take over this duty but merely to supplement it. And my program meant that this supplementary aid should be given where it is most needed - not where it is least needed. There are cities in this state, for example, which are solely dependent on one or two industries, where the particular industries have so materially ceased, that nearly every family will require some assistance. In such cities practically nothing <sup>can</sup> will be raised this winter either publicly or privately. How futile it would be to say to such cities that the state will give them only one-half of what they themselves can raise! ~~the people of every city, county, and village in the state~~ The harder it has been hit by present conditions, the less it can raise locally; under this bill, the less it can raise locally, the less the state will give it. The people in these localities who will need it most, can truly say, as check after check is sent down to the richer cities under this bill, "To him who hath shall be given".



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My recommendations would have provided a flexible distribution. The public spirited and unselfish board of three <sup>citizens</sup> whom I had hoped to appoint, would have been free to distribute this state supplementary assistance where it was needed most and to those who deserved it most. The cities which had the largest number of needy unemployed and which made <sup>every</sup> ~~most~~ efforts to raise money locally by public and private means would receive the largest proportionate amounts. That seems to me to be fair as well as efficient. The state <sup>knows</sup> how much it <sup>is</sup> going to spend and spends it where it is most needed. If by January 1, 1932, when the next regular session of the Legislature convenes, more money is needed, I shall not hesitate to ask for it and shall not hesitate to recommend a tax to provide it.

As <sup>to</sup> ~~the~~ administration, I cannot give full approval to the machinery set up in this bill. ~~It creates~~ <sup>it</sup> a little bureau in the department of social welfare. This department is already carrying its full burden. I have been so informed by the head of the department as well as by members of the board of social welfare. They believe and I believe that the regular routine year-by-year duties of this department, headed by a board of ten commissioners, should not be hampered or confused by this great emergency work which must, to be effective, be quick and direct. It is not the function of this department to do this emergency job. By its training and by its experience, its efforts can be most efficiently concentrated on its present statutory duties which are manifold in character and which it is performing and has performed in a most satisfactory manner. To put a temporary bureau in a permanent department is nothing more or less than bad government.

While this bill does not specifically so provide, the work of this bureau will, under the provisions of the State Departments Law, be subject and subordinate to the department officials. If it is not the intention to have this emergency work supervised, checked and confused by the regular work of a permanent state department, then the administration of this work should be



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set up as an independent agency. There is no basis to the contention urged by some that an independent temporary commission of this kind would conflict with the constitutional reorganization of the state government. The constitution specifically provides for just such temporary commissions; the whole intent of the amendment was to provide such temporary independent bodies to deal with emergencies, free from the restrictions and rules which govern the ordinary conduct of the state's business.

With respect to local administration, this bill compels the setting-up of local commissions in every city and county for work-relief; but does not permit a local commission in any city or county for home-relief. My recommendations were for a more flexible arrangement. I suggested that the central administration determine which districts required local commissions in the interests of efficiency and that such local commissions be given such powers and such control as were deemed necessary. The chief differences between us on this point is only as to whether an arbitrary rule should be made applicable to all localities or whether a flexible arrangement should be instituted permitting the most efficient and economical administration.

One very important recommendation made by me in my message to the Legislature, based on a very sound public policy, is overlooked entirely in this bill. I suggested the cardinal principle of relief that assistance in the form of food, clothing and shelter should be provided only after every possible effort had been made to furnish useful work. Insistence was to be placed on actual work and it was only when the possibilities of work were exhausted that other relief would be granted. The bill before me, however, contains no such safeguard. The truly American worker will accept food and clothing for himself and his family only when he cannot get work. For that reason, before such relief is offered to him, the state should insist that every effort be made to find useful occupation for the public good.

As a protection to the wage scale of the locality,



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I recommended to the Legislature the inclusion of a provision providing a prevailing rate of wage on this kind of relief work. If work is to be furnished, I believe that a living wage should be paid therefor in order to maintain the respect of the worker as well as to prevent competition with ordinary labor. The bill before me does not contain this safeguard and to my mind is, to that extent, further defective.

There are two other important defects in the present bill - First, the bill does not permit any part of the money appropriated to be spent for the necessary picks and shovels with which to do the work. It will be necessary, if useful work is to be done, to provide the necessary tools, equipment and supplies for the purpose. It has been the experience of certain localities that moneys have been appropriated for wages for work where it has been impossible to find the necessary funds with which to buy the requisite number of picks and shovels. Under the provisions of this bill, the same difficulty will arise. Second, a great deal of effective useful work can be provided through state agencies of the pick and shovel variety without any contractors' profits. Such work would include grading, road construction, clearing, and other hard manual labor. I am informed that several other departments are immediately prepared to carry on this kind of work if funds were made available to them. In this way, even before the emergency relief commission becomes organized and is ready to function, immediate useful employment can be found. For that reason, I recommended to the Legislature that a small part of the \$20,000,000. might be retained by the administration for this purpose. I find, however, that this bill contains no such provision. With state offices equipped to employ men in this way, it seems absurd to set up a relief administration using state money, but without authority to ~~any~~ spend any of it through the organized state departments.



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For all of the above reasons, I must disapprove this bill. I am anxious to get this work started. The people of the state want something done. New York must take the lead in this humanitarian work of alleviation of distress. But I cannot give my approval to this wasteful, inefficient and extravagant expenditure of \$20,000,000 of hard-earned taxpayers' money. I have not claimed, nor do I claim that my plan is perfect. I have not even desired credit for my plan or any plan. I offered to the Republican leaders in the Legislature the privilege of introducing bills under their own names carrying out my program, so that any personal or partisan advantage in its adoption might be theirs. They refused. I asked them to confer with me about it. They refused. After the bill before me passed one refused. house of the Legislature, I again invited them to confer with me. They refused. Some of the members of their own party asked for the privilege of exercising their own judgment and voting for my program. They refused.

We have done what we could and have been blocked. Only the force of public opinion remains.



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