
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Economic interdependence of city and country; reduction in cost
of State and local government, at Bridgeport, Connecticut,
September 3, 1932

I feel in the atmosphere of this meeting the unmistakable indication of
confidence and of united party support for the Democratic candidates in
Connecticut this year. The Democratic Party in Connecticut has been

cheered and inspired by the enlightened administration of Governor Cross. It is on its toes and ready for the race. I myself get word from the western border of your state that lies next to my own county of Dutchess that there is no question but that thousands of Republicans and Independents will join with the Democrats in re-electing Governor Cross for another term. Such a result is richly deserved.

There was a time when people spoke of the scholar in politics with a touch of condescension, but that time is gone. The position occupied by Governor Cross as an editor and a distinguished university Dean is vastly important in modern society. He was in a sense in a position where thought and opinion of all sorts came together and found expression. Out of it came a richness of understanding that has found such a fine expression in his conduct of the many-aided business of the state. His lifetime of sympathy for and participation in human affairs lead up to a culmination in this fine public service.

It ought to be remembered too that Governor Cross was a distinguished student and teacher of literature and out of the best literature of the country comes the inspiration for social, economic and political reform that means so much. It is well to remember that out of the foresight of great writers and sound students have come many of our most helpful social and governmental reforms.

The life of a scholar is a life of calm dealing with slow moving forces and it is well that in confronting the entrenched special interests that had so long ruled the Republican leaders of Connecticut, Governor Cross has had not only patience but tenacity of purpose. Every possible difficulty has been placed in the path of Governor Cross by this Republican leadership, dominated as it was by these selfish interests that had long since forgotten the rights of the plain people. It is unthinkable that the Governorship should be handed back to any person dominated by these interests. That is why I am confident of the re-election of Governor Cross.

And while I am on this subject of the control of government, I want to make clear to you, my neighbors, the importance and indeed the necessity from the point of view of the public good, of the presentation of a united front by the democracy in your state this year. This gathering tonight representing as it does every phase of our party and every section of the state is symbolic of what is going on almost without exception throughout the country. You as an individual and I as an individual call ourselves Democrats. You as an individual and I as an individual may very possibly not agree on every single one of two or three dozen proposals made by our party. The fact remains, however, that we are substantially agreed on a great majority of these proposals and that we are substantially agreed on all of the underlying principles behind specific proposals. The fact that you and I as individuals may not see eye to eye on one or two or three specifications does not mean that we part company on Election Day. The obvious reason is that we agree far more completely with each other than either one of us could agree in detail or in principle with the present Republican leadership.

Furthermore, and especially because of the fact that we are agreed on the broad principles of our party we can unite and are uniting in working for the general success of our party and its candidates. The democracy of Connecticut is, I am confident, a united party and as such will have general success in this state in November for its candidates on the national ticket, on the state ticket, and in its campaigns for Senator, for the Congressmen and for members of the Legislature. Nothing would give me greater happiness than for Connecticut to elect the Democratic candidates all down the line. The fulfillment of that result lies, let me tell you frankly, in your own hands. I say this because tens of thousands of voters in this state who in the past have been affiliated with the Republican Party—men and women not only in the cities but in the rock-ribbed Republican rural fortresses—are ready and anxious to support the democracy this year. They understand at last that we offer a greater progress in the march toward good government, simplified government, truly democratic government and the solution of our economic ills than does the Republican leadership in Washington or in Hartford in this year of grace 1932.

I want to make one simple plea to you and through you to the people of Connecticut and I feel that I can make it because your own economic conditions are so similar to those of your neighbor State of New York. I have been saying the same thing throughout the length and breadth of my own State during these past years.

Nowhere in the United States is there a better example of the essential interdependence of city and country of agriculture and industry than in this state of Connecticut. This city and the other Connecticut cities were very different communities up to the outbreak of the World War in 1914 from what they are today. The enormous growth of the cities because of the expansion of war industry brought to them from the rural sections of the state, and even from my own section of New York around Dutchess county, thousands of people who have been raised on farms. These people who came here because they found better economic opportunities did much to emphasize the essential unity of country and city and many of them found that the safest way of life from an economic point of view is one in which the advantages of city and country are combined. For this reason many thousands throughout this country during this industrial depression have moved back onto the farms, but this return cannot be done without definite planning and assistance by the government, and it is to that end that we in the State of New York have been working, a means to make this change possible. The most independent, as well as the most economically secure man in the world, is he who is partially sustained by farming and partially by industrial employment whenever the opportunity offers. It is to this end that I have devoted years of thought and study, and it is my purpose to make clear during this campaign how particularly in the eastern part of the country wise industrial encouragement can do much to knit city and country together and thus achieve substantial relief and a substantial balance in the economic life of millions of people.

Another factor that binds the city and country together is the common interest which we all have in reducing the costs of government. It goes without saying, that the costs of government are too high and this is particularly true of local government. The fact stands out that in the average community half of all that the individual pays for the support of the government goes to local government; most of the other half goes to Washington and only a small percentage of the whole—12 to 15 per cent goes to the carrying on of state government.

The cost of state government generally is not increasing, in fact some of the states have reduced their expenses considerably and most of them have actually balanced their budgets.

They are moreover making sensible far-reaching attempts not to go further into debt.

For example, the State of New York in 1932 cut millions off the tax budget. The net result has been a decrease of thirty-six millions, exclusive of unemployment relief. The general reduction of our expenses has been obtained in part by executive action and in part by the Legislature.

Not satisfied with that I am making an additional saving of \$10,000,000 this year in the actual operation of government. I have no control it should be remembered over \$150,000,000 of the New York State budget because these appropriations are either for debt service or for mandatory payments, such as State aid to localities for the support of schools and other purposes. In other words, my net saving of \$10,000,000 is made out of government operation appropriation of only a little more than \$100,000,000.

But the vast appropriations that are being made in New York State for local government must and should also be reduced. Over these my control is indirect, but I propose that by constant hammering home the importance of economy upon local authority some substantial improvement may be brought about.

It should be remembered that our institutions of local government were devised for quite different social conditions. They were built for the conditions of the past and not the present. They should be modernized, simplified and thus made less of a burden to the taxpayer. I do not know all the local conditions in Connecticut, but if New York is typical of con-

ditions throughout the country, there is need everywhere for a concentrated attention upon local government. As I have pointed out, 50 per cent of the burden of taxation is in these local communities. There should be a nation-wide effort to effect substantial relief.

I pointed this out in my acceptance speech and summoned democratic candidates in all the states to stand solidly by the party declaration for reduced governmental expenditures.

In the main, Connecticut has reason to be proud of its heritage of local government; its town government was framed out of the finest democratic principles. It was the embodiment of the aspirations for pure democracy that grew out of the great political reforms of three centuries ago. These New England institutions have stood for generations as the most complete approach to pure political democracy that the world has seen. But if I may draw inferences from other states the fine structure has been encumbered by useless encumbrance of unnecessary governmental agencies. The taxpayer, particularly the farmer, is blanketed by too many layers of local taxing authorities. The relieving of this is our first responsibility in restoring his economic well-being.

In a fundamental way this problem is the source of much of our present distress. The mortgages on our farms and the foreclosures thereon burden our banks, which strains the entire credit structure of the country. Moreover the railroads are likewise burdened by this local tax expense and it requires only a moment's reflection to see that when we burden the railroads in this way and force them to the brink of receivership, we are endangering the savings of the people in their savings banks and their insurance company. The economic life of the country is a seamless web. It must be adjusted so that strains are equally distributed and constant vigilance must be exercised to avoid a break in any one place.

My principle, however, and that of the Democratic Party is that every part of this seamless web is precious to the welfare of the Nation, and that the small farmer and the small homeowner must be the object of our most careful solicitude in these times of distress and relief.

It is, my friends, because the leadership of the Republican Party during these recent years has failed to understand that government must consider the high, the middle and the low—has failed to consider the forest, the farm, the village and the city with equal justice, that millions of voters are turning today to the leadership of a revitalized democracy. Change of party leadership does not strike at the fundamental principles of the Republic. On the contrary it gives opportunity to strip from those fundamentals of the fathers the weeds and vines which today obscure the simplicity and the cleanliness of its outline.

If you believe in that new deal you will have done your part towards the restoration of the purity and the success of representative government. We face that crisis with singleness of purpose and above all with faith. •

*Tape 76-14:1 shows that FDR added these words:

"Keep that faith constant. Keep that faith high.
So shall we win through to a better day."