
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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RADIO ADDRESS OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
Albany, New York, October 13, 1932

I am speaking to you from my desk in the Executive

Mansion in Albany of a subject which is not in the narrower sense of the word political, but which, because it is connected with government, vitally affects the life of almost every man, woman and child in the United States.

I cannot, of course, answer the hundreds of questions which come to me in every mail, but a letter signed by ten of the leading social welfare workers permits me to use their questions as a text for the expression of certain great basic principles which are vital to us in this time of stress.

The first question asks my position in relation to the duty of the Federal and State and local governments to provide funds and aid for the relief of those who are out of work.

The problem therein outlined is one which is very real in every section of the country, as I have good reason to know. This was accentuated by what I saw and heard on my recent trip to the Pacific Coast.

Let me answer it by laying down what I believe to be certain cardinal principles.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

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Let me answer it by laying down what I believe to be certain cardinal principles.

In the first place, even in an ideal community, where no one is out of work, there would always be the need of welfare work conducted through the churches, through private charity and by local government -- the need for clinics and hospitals and vocational training, the need for the care of the aged, for care of mental cases and for care of the crippled.

Such communities where there is no unemployment are almost utopian, for even in times of prosperity there are always some unemployed -- people who want to work but can find no work.

The first principle I would lay down is that the primary duty rests on the community, through local government and private agencies, to take care of the relief of unemployment. But we then come to a situation where there are so many people out of work that local funds are insufficient.

It seems clear to me that the organized society known as the State comes into the picture at this point. In other words, the obligation of government is extended to the next higher unit.

I practice what I preach. In 1930 the State of New York greatly increased its employment service and kept in close touch with the ability of localities to take care of

their own unemployed. But the summer of 1931 it became apparent to me that actual State funds and a State-supervised system was imperative.

I called a special session of the Legislature and they appropriated a fund of \$20,000,000 for unemployment relief, this fund to be reimbursed to the State through the doubling of our income taxes. Thus the State of New York became the first among all the states to accept the definite obligation of supplementing local funds where these local funds were insufficient.

The administration of this great work has become a model for the rest of the country. Without setting up any complex machinery or any large overhead, the State of New York is working successfully through local agencies, and in spite of the fact that over a million people are out of work and in need of aid in this one State alone, we have so far met at least the bare necessities of the case.

This past Spring the Legislature appropriated another \$5,000,000 and on November 8 the voters will pass on a \$30,000,000 bond issue to tide us over this Winter and at least up to next Summer.

Finally, let me come to the last step in the statement of the principle. I am very certain that the obligation

extends beyond the states and to the Federal government itself if and when it becomes apparent that states and communities are unable to take care of the necessary relief work.

It may interest you to have me read a short quotation from my message to the Legislature in 1931:

"What is the State? It is the duly constituted representative of an organized society of human beings, created by them for their mutual protection and well being. One of the duties of the State is that of caring for those of its citizens who find themselves the victims of such adverse circumstances as make them unable to obtain even the necessities of mere existence without the aid of others.

"In broad terms, I assert that modern society, acting through its government, owes the definite obligation to prevent the starvation or the dire want of any of its fellow men and women who try to maintain themselves but cannot. To these unfortunate citizens aid must be extended by the government -- not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of social duty."

That principle which I laid down in 1931, I reaffirm. I not only reaffirm it, I go a step further and say

that where the State itself is unable successfully to fulfill this obligation which lies upon it, it then becomes the positive duty of the Federal Government to step in to help.

In the words of our Democratic national platform, the Federal Government has a "continuous responsibility for human welfare, especially for the protection of children." That duty and responsibility the Federal Government should carry out promptly, fearlessly and generously.

It took the present Republican Administration in Washington almost three years to recognize this principle. I have recounted to you in other speeches, and it is a matter of general information, that for at least two years after the crash, the only efforts made by the National Administration to cope with the distress of unemployment, were to deny its existence.

When finally this year, after attempts at concealment and minimizing had failed, when they were at last forced to recognize the fact of suffering among millions of unemployed, appropriations of Federal funds for assistance to States were finally made.

I think it is fair to point out that a complete program of unemployment relief was on my recommendation

actually under way in the State of New York over a year ago, and that in Washington relief funds in any large volume were not provided until this Summer and at that they were pushed through at the demand of Congress rather than through the leadership of the President of the United States.

At the same time, I have constantly reiterated my conviction that the expenditures of cities, States and the Federal Government must be reduced in the interest of the nation as a whole. I believe that there are many ways in which such reduction of expenditures can take place, but I am utterly unwilling that economy should be practiced at the expense of starving people.

We must economize in other ways, but it shall never be said that the American people have refused to provide the necessities of life to those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to feed, clothe and house themselves. The first obligation of government is the protection of the welfare and well-being -- the very existence of its citizens.

So much for that.

The next question asks my attitude toward appropriations for public works as an aid of unemployment. I am perfectly clear as to the principles involved in this case also.

From the long-range point of view it would be

advisable for governments of all kinds to set up in times of prosperity what might be called a nest egg to be used for public works in times of depression. That is a policy which we should initiate when we get back to good times.

But there is the immediate possibility of helping the emergency through appropriations for public works. One question, however, must be answered first, because of the simple fact that these public works cost money.

We all know that government treasuries, whether local or State or Federal, are hard put to it to keep their budgets balanced, and in the case of the Federal Treasury thoroughly unsound financial policies have made its situation not exactly desperate, but at least threatening to future stability, if the policies of the present administration are continued.

All public works -- including Federal -- must be considered from the point of view of the ability of the government treasury to pay for them. There are two ways of paying for public works.

One is by the sale of bonds. In principle such bonds should be issued only to pay for self-sustaining projects or for structures which will without question have a useful life over a long period of years.

The other method of payment is from current revenues, which in these days means in most cases added taxes. And we all know that there is a very definite limit to the increase of taxes above the present level.

From this point, therefore, I can go on and say that if funds can be properly provided by the Federal Government for increased appropriations for public works, we must examine the character of these public works. I have already spoken of that type which is self-sustaining. These should be greatly encouraged.

The other type is that of public works which are honestly essential to the community. Each case must rest on its own merits. It is impossible, for example, to say that all parks or all playgrounds are essential. One may be and another may not be.

If a school, for instance, has no playground, it is obvious that the furnishing of a playground is a necessity to the community. But if the school already has a playground and some people seek merely to enlarge it, there may be a very definite question as to how necessary that enlargement is. Let me cite another example. I am much interested in providing better housing accommodations for the poor in our great cities.

If a slum area can be torn down and new modern buildings put up, I should call that almost a human necessity, but on the other hand, the mere erection of new buildings in some other part of the city while allowing the slums to remain raises at once a question of necessity. I am confident that the Federal Government working in cooperation with States and cities can do much to carry on increased public works and along lines which are sound from the economic and financial point of view.

Now I come to another question. I am asked whether I favor a system of unemployment insurance reserves made compulsory by the States, supplemented by a system of Federally coordinated State employment offices to facilitate the re-employment of jobless workers.

The first part of the question is directly answered by the Democratic platform, which advocates unemployment insurance under State laws.

This is no new policy for me. I have advocated unemployment insurance in my own State for some time, and indeed last year six Eastern Governors were my guests at a conference which resulted in the drawing up of what might be called an ideal plan of unemployment insurance.

This type of insurance is not a cure-all, but it

provides at least a cushion to mitigate unemployment in times of depression. It is sound if, after starting it, we stick to the principle of sound insurance financing. It is only where governments, as in some European countries, have failed to live up to these sound principles that unemployment insurance has been an economic failure.

As to the coordinated employment offices, I can only tell you that I was for the bills sponsored by Senator Wagner of my own State and passed by the Congress. They created a nationally coordinated system of employment offices operated by the individual States with the advisory cooperation of joint boards of employers and employees.

To my very great regret this measure was vetoed by the President of the United States. I am certain that the Federal Government can, by furnishing leadership, stimulate the various States to set up and coordinate practical useful systems.

These first three questions which I have discussed related to the relief of those who are unemployed, and it is perhaps logical that the next two questions should relate to children, because we know that unemployment works a great hardship on the young people of the coming generation.

I certainly favor the continuance of the fine work

which has been done by the Children's Bureau in Washington, but at the same time we must not forget that the Federal Government through several other agencies is constantly working for the welfare of children.

Attempts have been made to cut the appropriations for child welfare work. It seems to me that this is the last place in which we should seek to economize. I cannot agree with the member of President Hoover's Cabinet who suggests that this depression is not altogether a bad thing for our children.

You and I know the appalling fact that malnutrition is one of the saddest by-products of unemployment. The health of these children is being affected not only now but for all the rest of their lives.

Furthermore, a depression takes thousands of children away from schools and puts them to work to help the family income. They are underpaid and only too often work under conditions which, physically and morally, are often dangerous. It is well to remember, too, that the use of these untrained children in industry keeps many adults out of employment and has the effect of cutting down wages below a decent living standard.

These are only a few of the many reasons why the

Federal Government must continue to act as an agency to disseminate information about child welfare and to encourage State and local governments to raise their standards to the highest possible levels.

The last question relates to keeping children in school to the age of sixteen. I am in favor of that. Furthermore, I go along with the thought that we must increase vocational education for those children who otherwise would not receive adequate training. That kind of vocational training will raise the standards of worthwhile employment, not only now but also in normal times.

My own observation leads me to believe that in many parts of the country we have tended to an educational system devised too greatly for academic training and professional careers.

We know that already many of the professions are oversupplied, and it is a fair guess that during the coming generation we shall devote more attention to educating our boys and girls for vocational pursuits which are just as honorable, just as respectable and in many instances just as remunerative as are the professions themselves.

The Federal Government, without in any way taking away the right and the duty of the several States to manage

their own educational affairs, can act as a clearing house of information and as an incentive to higher standards.

But the Federal Government has had no continuing policy for dealing with problems of public health and social welfare. In this as in other activities a multiplicity of unrelated agencies have been developed hit-or-miss to deal with aspects of the same problem. The result has been waste of men and money; more costly and less efficient service than we should have.

The administration has done nothing to reorganize this or other branches of the Federal Government, in spite of campaign promises at the last three Presidential elections. I propose to inaugurate a definite long-range plan for dealing with all phases of public health and welfare, which are a proper concern of the Federal Government.

May I add that in the State of New York during the past four years we have accomplished definite and practical results by coordinating and planning the work of the State.

I cite as a simple example the public health program, which is a part of my administration. It has been referred to in other States as the most important contribution to practical public health work during this generation. And all of this we have taken out of politics.

The same principles can and should be applied to the health and welfare work of the Federal Government.

In closing, will you let me make an appeal to the entire country -- an appeal with all my heart, with all my mind and with all my soul -- to let nothing interfere with the duty and obligation of coming forward as individuals and as groups to the support of the unemployed and the support of their dependents during the coming Winter.

By proclamation I can make official appeal to the State of which I am Governor, but I think that I have the right, as a Presidential candidate, to make an unofficial appeal to my fellow-Americans in every other State.

I wish that every man, woman and child above the age of reason in the whole country would make the coming Thanksgiving Day and the coming Christmas Day occasions to contribute with money or food or clothing, or all three, to the direct relief of local needs.

Let us remember that in addition to whatever it may be possible for the Federal Government or State Government or municipalities to do in relieving the tremendous and increasing burden of relief work, misery and distress will still be great unless individuals, unless societies and churches practice actual charity -- actual love of their

neighbor -- to an extent even greater than at any time in the past.

Let us who have jobs or money or shelter for ourselves and our own families share with the less fortunate. Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day of 1932 will take on an added significance -- the significance of a higher American ideal of social justice.

1932
Oct
. 16



STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY.

The United States Navy plays a role supplemental to that of defense. The American Fleet, its component ships and collectively serve this country as envoys of international amity and promoters of good will.

This phase of the activities of the Navy constitutes in itself a definite compliment to the sense of duty of the crews manning our ships. The officers and men of our Navy are ever aware that the protective function of the United States Navy is not confined solely to a safeguarding of American lives and interests. Their conception of duty, so often illustrated in the past, imposes upon them the protection and saving of human life in any and all emergencies. They have time after time given convincing demonstration of this comprehension of their glorious calling; in helpful action they have written their own testimonial.

Now, therefore, I, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby proclaim and set apart October 27th, as

NAVY DAY

and I urge the people of New York to honor the officers and men of the United States Navy upon this day by a display of the American Flag and to reflect upon the gallant traditions that have been such an inspiration to the men of our day. I ask as well that whenever possible visits be made to ships of the fleet that a more intimate acquaintance be formed of the real Americans who man them.

GIVEN under my hand and the

Privy Seal of the State

at the Capitol in the

City of Albany this

eighteenth day of

October in the year of

our Lord one thousand

nine hundred and thirty-

two.

By the Governor:

Secretary to the Governor.