## 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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1932 October 18

**Buffalo, NY - Campaign Address** 

## SPEECH OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT Buffalo, New York

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October 18, 1932

Mr. Chairman, and my old friends of Buffalo and Erie County, and the western part of my State:

The last time I was here in waking hours was on a certain second of July, when I entered Buffalo from the air on my way to Chicago, and I shall never forget either that splendid flying field of yours out there, or that devoted little group of my old friends of Buffalo who came to wish me Godspeed on the rest of a very bumpy journey. (Applause)

Way back about that time, on the second of July, I hoped that two things would happen, later on in the fall. The first was that my first Lieutenant Governor, Herbert Lehman, (applause) would be nominated for the Governership of this state, and the second was that I hoped to be able to come out to Western New York to bespeak your vote in his behalf. (Applause) I will be quite frank with you, my neighbors of this State, in telling you that I am not going to do any campaigning on my own behalf in this State, for the very good reason that you people know me.

You know whatever there is good in me and you know my faults. That being so, I am going to leave it to your good judgment as to whether I will carry the State again on November 8

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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
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by 725,000 (applause). And I am not going to talk to you tonight, make a formal speech, about national politics. I am going to talk to you as one of your neighbors, talk to you a little bit about some of our problems in this state; problems that have been yours and mine over a great many years; problems that have been in large part solved, so far as the present goes; problems which will continue in intensity, continue in importance, during the coming years; problems that can be faced in one of two ways — either from the point of view of forward-looking, progressive government or from the point of view of the kind of government that you and I had in this State the last time we had a Republican Governor, and I refer to an old friend of mine, a fine citizen, Governor Miller, who served from 1921 to 1923.

And the reason I speak feelingly of this matter is this: Way back, 20 years ago, 22 years ago to be exact, there were a number of young men in the Legislature, a legislature that was that year Democratic for the first time in 20 years, the legislature of 1911, young men like Jim Foley, Bob Wagner, Al Smith and myself (applause).

Out of that session of 1911, there grew a definite policy which has been that of the Democratic Party in this State ever since, and perhaps we, because we tag the Democratic Party, were the progressive label, by the same token the other

party has had the other kind of a label. It has stood for cheese-paring, for conservatism, and for a complete failure through all these years to initiate any measure of progress that you and I have ever heard of. Let us run through the list:

Back there in 1911 you people in this State got out of that one session alone more progressive legislation than you had had in a lifetime. -- Workmen's Compensation! That was an achievement all by itself.

You got direct primaries.

You got factory inspection laws. You got the protection of women and children in industry. You got the provision for one-day rest in seven. And even in those days, and by that legislation we can prove it, the Democratic party was talking and acting in behalf of what I call the "forgotten man." (Applause, prolonged).

In other words, the men and women constituting the great mass of the people who because they have not got position, who because they have not got wealth, are more than likely to be overlooked in the processes of Government.

That's why they need the protection of a Party that stands for liberalism, and humanity. (Applause) And for four years in Albany the Government of the State continued progressive legislation. And then for four years it stood still

under the administration of Governor Whitman. The result was that when Alfred E. Smith was elected to office for the first time in 1918 he found much to do -- and he put his shoulder to the wheel. (Applause, prolonged)

He was followed by two years of Governor Miller. And a great deal was said and done about economy during those two years. So much so, my friends, that when Governor Smith came back on the first of January, 1923, he found the men and women of the State who are unfortunate enough to have to go to the hospitals of the State — he found them living and sleeping out in the corridors. He found them living under conditions that were one hundred years out of date. He found the prisons of the state over-crowded and full of the highest type of unsanitary conditions.

And he had to start to make up for the loss of time. You know his great record for six years. You know the strengthening of the labor laws during that period. You know how he protected this state against the effort to steal from the people of the state the state-owned water power of the St. Lawrence, (applause). You know about the great system of parks which he instituted from one end of the state to the other, and you know the great odds that he fought against.

The Republican leadership in both houses of the legislature that was constantly trying to block, block, block

and block, every time, every move that he initiated, something for the benefit of the average citizen. Four years ago I inherited the same kind of a fight. Well, I like a fight. (Applause)

Somebody said up in Rochester today that I had my fighting clothes on. (Laughter) They are right. I have only got three weeks to go, and I am not going to take them off. (Applause) Now let's do a little analyzing; as Al would have said, "Let's look at the record." (Applause) You are going to hear a great deal about the government of this state in the next three weeks. You are going to hear the same old story that confronted you people in 1922, 1924, and 1926 and 1928 and 1930.

And every time you saw through the fog, you saw through the beclouding of the true issue, and the result was that you sent down to Albany Democratic Governors. (Applause)

Let us ask some questions. Who was it that proposed to make the so-called 48-hour a week law for women in industry a real 48-hour law? It took me two years of cussing and brow-beating the Republican leaders in the Legislature before I could make it a 48-hour law. (Applause) Who was it that proposed a half holiday a week for women in industry? Oh, after two years the Republican legislature put it through, but it took two years of constant prodding to get it done, and I suppose somebody will now say it was a Republican measure. (Laughter)

Who proposed putting occupational diseases of workers under the Workmen's Compensation Act? That took me three years and finally my good friend, Judge Knight, caved in. (Applause) Who was it that proposed the extension of the system of State employment offices in this state over the protest of the Republican leader? Who was it that put in every year into the budget money to carry out Alfred E. Smith's system of state parks for the average citizens? (Applause) And last but not least who was it that first suggested — ask your former fellow-citizen, the present Republican candidate for Governor that question — who was it that proposed the present system of old age pension laws in this state? (Applause)

Yes, and who put through, after a three-year fight, the law for the development of the state-owned motor power on the St. Lawrence for the benefit of the home owners and farm owners and small business men of this state? Ask him that. (Applause)

There came out in the paper the other day a report of a speech by your distinguished fellow-citizen, who by the way is an old friend of mine, and a fine fellow and a brave soldier -- and the story of his speech contains this headline "Col. Donovan ridicules the forgotten man." And he wants to know what we have ever done for the forgotten man? I have gone back with you good people to 1911, and I have shown you

what has been done for the forgotten man, in this State, under Democrats and under Democratic Governors. (Applause) Now, let us just go a little bit further.

Let us analyze some more things that have been said and some things that are going to be said in the next three weeks. You will be told that this state is in a serious way financially. Well, that is easy for people in Buffalo. All you have to do is to ask Morris Tremaine. (Applause) Or if you do not believe Morris -- although he is the best comptroller the State has ever had (applause) -- you can go to your banker and say What is the credit rating of the State of New York? How does the credit of the State of New York compare with that of the Federal Government? (Laughter and applause)

I see you know the answer. And how does the credit of the State of New York compare with the credit of the other 47 States of the Union? And it is the same answer, because this state has the best credit and the soundest structure of government finance of any state in the Union, and I am proud of it, and I am proud that in this period of depression we have come through with the best balanced budget of any state in the Union. (Applause)

Now, let's see why. It isn't entirely Morris' doing, or mine. There happens to be a clause in the Constitution of this State, and it ought to be a clause in the Constitution of every State, and of the United States Government as well

(applause) -- it is a very simple clause. It provides that every year in January the Governor of the State shall submit to the legislature a budget. Now, what does that mean? It must be a balanced budget, and thereupon the legislature is supposed to pass appropriations, and if necessary, taxes, to create a balanced system of finances for the state.

But into that budget must go whatever deficit there has been during the previous year. The result is that from the bookkeeping point of view, or from a cash point of view the Government of the State of New York can never be more than one year behind. Get that! (Applause)

And it means that if there is a deficit in our state finances this year, -- in other words, if the tax receipts don't measure up to what we had expected them to be then the appropriation and the taxes for the following year must be enough to pay off the deficit of the preceding year.

Is that clear?

In other words, the State of New York can't go broke. (Applause, prolonged)

More than that -- let me put it another way: Suppose we run a deficit in our family bookkeeping for one year, we cannot constitutionally go out to the banks and say "Let us have a long-term borrowing of that amount and spread this deficit over twenty or thirty or forty years." That, my friends, is

the custom of the Federal Government during the present administration. (Applause, prolonged)

I will tell you what it is like: Let us take a simple illustration: If you or I in our own families -suppose we figure out at the beginning of the year a family budget based on our income, and suppose the family income is say \$2500 a year: We fix up, with the aid of our good wife, estimated expenditures that are within the \$2500. Now, suppose for the sake of argument that the salaries of the father, and whoever else works in the family, are cut down to \$2000 a year: We can't perhaps cut out expenditures quite fast enough to get the cut in our salaries, and the result is that at the end of the year the family ends up with a deficit of \$200. Under the Washington system the family would go to the bank and say, "Lend us \$200 for 30 years." (Laughter) And then, if they ran a deficit the following year, they would go to the bank again, and say, "Lend us another couple of hundred dollars to be paid back in 30 years," and the result would be that each year we would be getting deeper and deeper into the hole. And very soon after a short number of years we would find as a family that the continuing interest charges of the bank on those loans were actually eating up all of our income, and we would have to go to the poorhouse. (Laughter, applause)

Now, the State of New York can't go and borrow money for 30 years. It has got to balance its budget the following

year so that that deficit of this year is actually paid off within the next year. I call that pretty good business, and the Democratic Party in this State has lived up to those clauses in the constitution, and has lived up to the good business practice of balancing budgets. Now, you will hear in the next two or three weeks -- I will come down to the next point of this -- you will hear about how the cost of Government in this state has gone up, -- since that famous Miller administration when we slipped backwards in two years almost as much as we had gone ahead in the previous ten. The comparison is made between the cost of running the State of New York in 1922, and in 1932, and here is the figure: In 1922 the cost of state government was 143 million, and in 1932 it was 276 million, and they are asking you how about that increase of 133 million dollars which we are spending today over and above what we spent ten years ago.

All right, that's a fair question, if it is fairly put and honestly asked. What is the answer? Number one -- now, I will just touch the high spots, because they are easy figures to get. One hundred and thirty-three million dollars has got to be spent some way or another. Well, number one, the state's policy has been to build certain structures, like hospitals, that will last 80 or 100 years, or prisons like the one over here in Attica, that will last 80 or 100 years -- to build them through bond issues rather than to make the people

of the state pay for our lack of facilities, our lack of foresight, over a whole generation gone by. And so we have gone to the state for somewhere around 200 million dollars to build permanent structures, to eliminate the grade crossings -- and Buffalo knows something about that, because you got a great big slice of it -- and of the interest charges on those bonds. And by the way we are paying off every year, running twelve million dollars higher than they did ten years ago.

That's what they call debt service. Does the distinguished gentleman who is running for Governor on the Republican ticket think that he can cut down on that debt service? That's easy. You've got him there. And then the next item is 80 million dollars, a great big whale of an item. It's made up of what I call money that flies through Albany. It is made up of money that comes in from tax collections, income tax, inheritance tax, corporation tax, stock exchange tax, and so forth and so on, and it comes in to Morris Tremaine's office in the morning, and in the afternoon he sends it out in the form of checks — a big check to New York City, and another big check to Buffalo, and another one to Rochester, Syracuse and Utica, Cataraugus, Shenango, Orleans and every other county in the state.

In other words, it is what we call state aid. It is money that is collected by the state and turned over to the

localities for them to spend. Sixty-eight million dollars of this increase goes to one form of state aid alone, education. I don't know what the figure is of your check that you get in the City of Buffalo, or the county or Erie, from the Comptroller of this state to help pay for your common schools, grade schools, high schools, teachers' college, and so forth and so on, but it runs into the millions. Now, can we cut there? Sixty million out of 133 million increase is caused by the policy of this state to help in the education of every child in the population of our state,

I believe that Colonel Donovan has said down in Brooklyn the other day, or in Queens, "Oh, I wouldn't cut that. I don't believe in cutting down in the educational facilities for our children." Well, let's go on. I wonder if he believes in cutting down on the aid to towns and counties, for all sorts of purposes. It isn't a big item, only a million and a half. I wonder if he believes in cutting on the farm problem a couple of hundred thousand for snow removal. Well, we want to get our milk and other things in the winter time as much as in the summer time, and we try to keep the roads clear. I wonder very much if he believes in cutting down or stopping altogether the eight million dollars that the State pays to the localities every year for old age support?

I was talking about that before -- old age pension.

Four years ago I went to the Legislature and asked them to pass a law, and they gave me a commission. You know it is perfectly marvellous how quick people are in this campaign, in any state in the Union, to know just what I mean when I say "Commissions." (Applause and laughter) Oh, the Commission racket has not been a patented article by Washington, D. C., by a long shot. (Applause) It is a patented article especially of the existing Republican leadership in almost every state in this Union including New York.

Well, they gave me a Commission to investigate old age pensions, but by great luck they put on some pretty good people, and I managed to slip on some perfectly grand people as minority members, and the result was, to the perfect horror of the Republican leaders, the second year this Commission brought in a report, and said, "We are in favor of old age pensions." The Republican leaders did not like it at all, and then they began to hear from the State, and of course the theory was a very simple one. The theory was that in these modern days it is a whole lot better, when old people get to the point where, through no fault of their own, they are up against it, they are in need and want, that it is far better for the State to spend something to keep them with their own families, with their own relatives, or in the homes of their neighbors, keep them in home life rather than cart them off to

the finest institution in the world. (Applause) Yes, there were somewhere around 80 million dollars that went for contributions by the State to local government.

And then we set up, as we should have done, quite properly, retirement systems for state employees, for teachers' annuities, for compensation insurance and for the maintenance of our Indian quota, funds that totalled nearly \$5,000,000. Some people say that those phases of legislation that were advocated by the Democrats were really legislation for the forgotten people of the State, people that have been forgotten by Governor Miller and forgotten by Governor Whitman, people that have been remembered by Governor Smith and myself. (Applause)

Well, there is another item and that is the increase of a good many millions of dollars for taking care -- somewhere around \$12,000,000 I think -- for taking care of the people in our institutions. I think it was my second year in office that Col. Lehman - no, it was not, it was the summer of the first year in office, that I asked the Lt. Gov. to go through this state because I knew he was a man who understood business, and secondly he was a man with a heart, and a man with vision -- I asked him to go through this State and look into our institutions. He did. He visited every hospital that the state maintained -- and mind you, the State is taking care

of 65,000 wards, patients, in its hospitals at the present time and seven or eight thousand prisoners in addition to that, and Col. Lehman's report showed that much could be done to bring the treatment and care that these wards of the state were receiving up to a modern basis.

The prisoners in this State were being fed at the rate of 21 cents a day. Twenty-one cents a day was all the food that the prisoners of the State of New York were getting, and I insisted, and the legislature got generous, and now we are spending 27 cents a day on the prisoner.

Does the Republican candidate for Governor want to cut it back?

In the old days when I was a boy people who had some kind of mental trouble and went to a state hospital for the feeble minded or the insane went in there and never came out until they came out in a coffin, and yet today because of a progressive policy in this state there is not a year that goes by that we do not increase the number of cures of the mental cases committed to our care. (Applause)

And in the long run what is cheapest, my friends, to send out 22 per cent of all those who go into our hospitals, send them back cured to their families or keep them there all the rest of their lives?

And the same thing applies to the prisoners. What

is cheaper, to continue the present parole system that we set up two years ago under which 7000 boys are out on parole under supervision of parole officers throughout the length and breadth of the state learning to be good citizens, is it cheaper to maintain that parole system at a cost of \$300,000 a year or to build more prisons and keep those 7000 boys in prison at a cost of \$3,000,000 a year? (Applause)

And so it is an equally fair question to ask my friend, Col. Donovan, Is he going to retain the parole system of this state or not?

I could go on throughout the length of a complicated thing called a budget; I could give you lots of figures but the fact remains that taking it by and large this increase over ten years of \$133,000,000 is made up in large part of three items: First, debt service, about \$12,000,000; secondly, state aid to localities, not for the State to spend but for the localities to spend, most of it on education; and thirdly, the normal increase caused by the fact that the population of this State does not believe in birth control and insists on going up. (Laughter and applause) We have to take care of about a million and a half more people in the State of

New York than we did ten years ago, and so it is a fair question.

I would like to stay in this state for the next three weeks and keep on asking those questions myself. I

would like to ask my friend, the Colonel, lots of questions as he goes around talking finances of the State of New York, but I have to go out and cover a large part of the United States, 17 more states in the course of the next nine days, and so I will let you people ask the questions, and every time that a Republican candidate or a Republican speaker talks to you about finances, you say to him: Where are you going to cut?

I will let you in on a secret. I will tell you where we are going to cut, and how we are going to cut, and do not believe Republican speakers when they quote figures to you about the cost of Government in this State. I have seen it stated, erroneously —— and I am afraid with malice aforethought —— that the cost of this past year was \$300,000,000. The Legislature passed an appropriation for \$273,000,000 which was a reduction from the year before of 34 million dollars, and the year before the Republican Legislature passed appropriations of \$14,000,000 more than I had asked them for.

This year, the Government of the State of New York had given to it by the Legislature \$273,000,000. But I am not spending it. I am Scotch. (Applause, prolonged) So far, without violating the law, I have found ways of leaving in the treasury of the State, in the perfectly safe hands of another Scotchman, -- Morris Tremaine, (applause) -- this year I am

going to leave somewhere between ten and fifteen million dollars out of that unspent. And beginning, the end of next week. -- even before November 8th, -- I am going into a huddle with the Lieutenant Governor, the next Governor (applause), and with the Comptroller -- (applause, prolonged), -who is the next Comptroller (applause), -- and the Director of the budget, -- and we are going to go through the Department estimates with a fine tooth comb. And my friends, I am perfectly confident in my own mind that when those budget estimates are made up they will show a total saving in the coming year of this State of \$25,000,000 less than the present budget of this year. (Applause, prolonged) We are going to cut out some of the functions of Government, -- some of the frills of Government, -- and we are going to cut down all we possibly can in every place, -- but we are not going to cut out the essentials of Government, -- especially those essentials that apply to the lives and well-being of the average man, woman and child. (Applause, prolonged)

Well, so much for that: There you have the picture of the financial problem of the State, and I tell you that this state is not only solvent, but that we can't go broke.

(Applause) We are cutting down the cost of Government as far as any reasonable set of human beings will want it cut down.

We are not going to cut down in the work of caring for the people of the State. (Applause) And that brings me to just

this point: Who was it a year ago who first among all the States of the Union -- a whole year, ahead of the Federal Government -- who was it that first started the definite principle, accepted the principle that it was the duty of the State to see to it that none of its citizens went hungry, that none of its citizens went without a roof over their heads. (Applause, prolonged)

A year ago the Legislature in special session met and passed appropriations of twenty millions of dollars to take care of unemployment relief in the State of New York during the past winter, and spring. (Applause)

And we know that we had still some tax resources left. So, instead of issuing bonds for it, we doubled the income tax and got away with it. (Applause, prolonged) Then this was the Spring, and having taken care of our own, we added another five million dollars to it for good measure. But, my friends, under the present condition of national economics — and mind you, no state in this Union can all by itself change the economics of the Nation under our present national economic condition. It was obvious that the coming winter was going to be a hard one, with the result that we are asking the good people of this state on November 8 to approve of funds for the taking care of unemployment relief

during the coming winter. We are asking for a sum which is larger than last year's sum, because the distress is great. We are asking it not in the form of another tax.

We are asking it for this special single year in the form of a bond issue, — the right to issue thirty million dollars of bonds to take care of our unemployment relief for a year to come. (Applause) That question is going to be submitted to you on the eighth of November, and I hope that every man, woman and child in this state will recognize the seriousness of the situation and will vote their approval of that bond issue in common humanity. (Applause, prolonged) (Loud cheering)

Now, I am not going to do any threatening. I am going to tell you a simple fact: The State of New York recognizes its obligation to see that nobody starves; that nobody goes hungry; that nobody goes without clothes, and without shelter; and if you don't get this money that way, my friends, the next Legislature and the next Governor have got to raise the money between them, some other way, and there isn't any other way, except by increasing your taxes and mine. (Applause)

And that's why I have got my heart for the discharge of this bond issue, the approval of it by the people of this state by the biggest majority that has ever been given to any

proposition submitted to them. (Applause)

And now there is just one thing more before I start for Pittsburgh (applause) and that is, I want to tell you -- (applause) -- there is just one more thing that is coming up in the ballot box, on the voting machines in November 8th. There are just two propositions to be put before the voters of the state. One is this 30 million dollar bond issue that I hope and pray that it goes through almost unanimously.

The other is a proposition for the weakening, for the opening of the door to the splendid constitutional provision that we have now for the preservation of our Adirondack preserves and our Catskill preserves. You know they are two great areas, the largest owned by any state in the Union, set aside for the use of the people of this state in perpetuity and never to be touched, to be left in the wild state of nature in which God made them.

And let me tell you the simple record, that this past summer over a half million people, nearly all of them citizens of this state, have registered at the different camp sites -- very large their use is -- that the state maintains in the Adirondacks and the Catskills. Now, they go through them, hiking and hunting and fishing, for their wholesome, health-giving recreational purposes, and the additional number.

besides those, who registered at the camp sites would run literally into the millions.

This provision that you are going to be asked to vote on is a proposition that would allow a town or two towns or a series of towns within the Adirondack or the Catskill preserves to break down that historic provision in our constitution and do all sorts of things — put up amusement places, put in Coney Islands. In other words, try to derive some profit out of what is the heritage of the people of the State of New York. Everybody interested in conservation so far as I know, every association and society is begging and praying that we won't tamper with that splendid Adirondack and Catskill Preserve.

And so I hope that there won't be any question that the people recognizing their heritage will vote "No" on that proposition and save our own woods. (Applause)

And that is another question I would like to ask of the gentleman who is running for Governor on the Republican Ticket: How does he stand on that measure which was introduced by the Republican Leaders in the Legislature of his own party? And so, my friends, you have got a choice once more for about the tenth time in rapid succession. For over ten years you have been talking about, -- wondering on Election day, before Election day, -- as to how you were going to

Today you have two very delightful gentlemen running for the Office of Governor, -- one of them a fellow-citizen of yours. The other one is a man who has three great qualifications for the Governorship: First, splendid business training -- and the Lord only knows we need a business man as Governor during the next two years, -- (applause) -- and the second is the qualification, very essential of knowing the problems of State Government, and not having to learn it from the ground up, -- a man who has been around this state during the past four years, into every nook and corner of it, into every institution, who knows the State better than I do -and that's saying a lot -- who is keen on finding out what the needs are in every county, and in every town and in every city; and the third qualification that he has got is something that is worth more than all the others put together; it is not just that his heart is in the right place. -- Most of us have got our hearts in the right place, -- the most hardboiled fellow in the world if he sees a beggar lying in the gutter, is not going to pass by on the other side -- but a heart in the right place doesn't always get used. I want a man who uses his heart -- a man who understands the relationship of human beings to human beings, -- a man who understands the relationship of Government to human beings, a man who believes that we cannot stand still, and that even in the

face of necessary economy we have got to go on protecting people in their existence, protecting them in their lives, in their association with each other. In other words, a man who translates his humanity into deeds and actions, and a man that we have got running for Governor this fall is one who has been associated with me to my very great advantage during the past four years, — a man who was associated with me years ago, in war times down in Washington, — a man who understands this state, and a man who will carry on what has become a tradition in this State, a Government that is aimed at progressive and liberal policies, and won't stand still. (Applause)

And so, I say my friends, I am going away tonight headed West again, and then South and then over to the Eastward, and then back to vote, and in the meantime, I am very confident that not only the good sense of the people of this state, but the sober judgment of the people of this State, and the humanitarian impulses of the people of this state are going to spread upon the record faith in democratic leadership, faith in the great man who has been offered to you to be your leader during the next four years, -- Col. Herbert H. Lehman. (Applause)

And as I said, over in Rochester today, when I get down to the White House I want to be able to lift up the telephone and get the cooperation of the State of New York and say, "Hello Herbert, come over and see me." (Applause)