
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

**Series 2: “ You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR
and the New Deal**

File No. 710

1934 June 8

Message to Congress in re the Recovery Program

RECORDS OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
RECORD GROUP 46

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT
OF JUNE 8, 1934
RELATING TO
DROUGHT RELIEF AND RECOVERY

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON: 1955

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TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

You are completing a work begun in March 1933, which will be regarded for a long time as a splendid justification of the vitality of representative government. I greet you and express once more my appreciation of the cooperation which has proved so effective.

Only a small number of the items of our program remain to be enacted and I am confident that you will pass on them before adjournment. Many other pending measures are sound in conception, but must, for lack of time or of adequate information, be deferred to the session of the next Congress. In the meantime, we can well seek to adjust many of these measures into certain larger plans of governmental policy for the future of the Nation.

You and I, as the responsible directors of these policies and actions, may, with good reason, look to the future with confidence, just as we may look to the past fifteen months with reasonable satisfaction.

On the side of relief we have extended material aid to millions of our fellow citizens.

On the side of recovery we have helped to lift agriculture and industry from a condition of utter prostration.

But, in addition to these immediate tasks of relief and recovery we have properly, necessarily and with overwhelming approval determined to safeguard these tasks by rebuilding many of the structures of our economic life and of reorganizing it in order to prevent a recurrence of collapse.

It is childish to speak of recovery first and reconstruction afterward. In the very nature of the processes of recovery we must avoid the destructive influences of the past.

We have shown the world that democracy has within it the elements necessary to its own salvation.

Less hopeful countries where the ways of democracy are very new may revert to the autocracy of yesterday. The American people can be trusted to decide wisely upon the measures taken by the government to eliminate the abuses of the past and to proceed in the direction of the greater good for the greater number.

Our task of reconstruction does not require the creation of new and strange values. It is rather the finding of the way once more to known, but to some degree forgotten, ideals and values. If the means and details are in some instances new, the objectives are as permanent as human nature.

Among our objectives I place the security of the man, women and children of the Nation first.

This security for the individual and for the family concerns itself primarily with three factors. People want decent homes to live in; they want to locate them where they can engage in productive work; and they want some safeguard against misfortunes which cannot be wholly eliminated in this man-made world of ours.

In a simple and primitive civilization homes were to be had for the building. The bounties of nature in a new land provided crude but adequate food and shelter. When land failed, our ancestors moved on to better land. It was always possible to push back the frontier, but the frontier has now disappeared. Our task involves the making of a better living out of the lands that we have.

So, also, security was attained in the earlier days through the interdependence of members of families upon each other

and of the families within a small community upon each other. The complexities of great communities and of organized industry make less real these simple means of security. Therefore, we are compelled to employ the active interest of the Nation as a whole through government in order to encourage a greater security for each individual who composes it.

With the full cooperation of the Congress we have already made a serious attack upon the problem of housing in our great cities. Millions of dollars have been appropriated for housing projects by federal and local authorities, often with the generous assistance of private owners. The task thus begun must be pursued for many years to come. There is ample private money for sound housing projects; and the Congress, in a measure now before you, can stimulate the lending of money for the modernization of existing homes and the building of new homes. In pursuing this policy we are working toward the ultimate objective of making it possible for American families to live as Americans should.

In regard to the second factor, economic circumstances and the forces of nature themselves dictate the need of constant thought as to the means by which a wise government may help the necessary readjustment of the population. We cannot fail to act when hundreds of thousands of families live where there is no reasonable prospect of a living in the years to come. This is especially a national problem. Unlike most of the leading Nations of the world, we have so far failed to create a national policy for the development of our land and water resources and for their better use by those people who cannot make a living in their present positions. Only thus can we permanently eliminate many millions of people from the relief rolls on which their names are

now found.

The extent of the usefulness of our great natural inheritance of land and water depends on our mastery of it. We are now so organized that science and invention have given us the means of more extensive and effective attacks upon the problems of nature than ever before. We have learned to utilize water power, to reclaim deserts, to recreate forests and to redirect the flow of population. Until recently we have proceeded almost at random, making many mistakes.

There are many illustrations of the necessity for such planning. Some sections of the Northwest and Southwest which formerly existed as grazing land, were spread over with a fair crop of grass. On this land the water table lay a dozen or twenty feet below the surface, and newly arrived settlers put this land under the plow. Wheat was grown by dry farming methods. But in many of these places today the water table under the land has dropped to fifty or sixty feet below the surface and the top soil in dry seasons is blown away like driven snow. Falling rain, in the absence of grass roots, filters through the soil, runs off the surface, or is quickly reabsorbed into the atmosphere. Many million acres of such land must be restored to grass or trees if we are to prevent a new and man-made Sahara.

At the other extreme, there are regions originally arid, which have been generously irrigated by human engineering. But in some of these places the hungry soil has not only absorbed the water necessary to produce magnificent crops, but so much more water that the water table has now risen to the point of saturation, thereby threatening the future crops upon which many families depend.

Human knowledge is great enough today to give us assurance of success in carrying through the abandonment of many millions of acres for agricultural use and the replacing of these acres with others on which at least a living can be earned.

The rate of speed that we can usefully employ in this attack on impossible social and economic conditions must be determined by business-like procedure. It would be absurd to undertake too many projects at once or to do a patch of work here and another there without finishing the whole of an individual project. Obviously, the government cannot undertake national projects in every one of the 435 Congressional districts, nor even in every one of the 48 states. The magnificent conception of national realism and national needs that this Congress has built up has not only set an example of large vision for all time, but has almost consigned to oblivion our ancient habit of pork barrel legislation: to that we cannot and must not revert. When the next Congress convenes I hope to be able to present to it a carefully considered national plan, covering the development and the human use of our natural resources of land and water over a long period of years.

In considering the cost of such a program it must be clear to all of us that for many years to come we shall be engaged in the task of rehabilitating many hundreds of thousands of our American families. In so doing we shall be decreasing future costs for the direct relief of destitution. I hope that it will be possible for the government to adopt as a clear policy to be carried out over a long period, the appropriation of a large, definite, annual sum so that work may proceed year after year not under the urge of temporary expediency, but in pursuance of the well considered rounded objective.

The third factor relates to security against the hazards and vicissitudes of life. Fear and worry based on unknown danger contribute to social unrest and economic demoralization. If, as our Constitution tells us, our federal government was established among other things "to promote the general welfare", it is our plain duty to provide for that security upon which welfare depends.

Next winter we may well undertake the great task of furthering the security of the citizen and his family through social insurance.

This is not an untried experiment. Lessons of experience are available from states, from industries and from many Nations of the civilized world. The various types of social insurance are inter-related; and I think it is difficult to attempt to solve them piecemeal. Hence, I am looking for a sound means which I can recommend to provide at once security against several of the great disturbing factors in life -- especially those which relate to unemployment and old age. I believe there should be a maximum of cooperation between states and the federal government. I believe that the funds necessary to provide this insurance should be raised by contribution rather than by an increase in general taxation. Above all, I am convinced that social insurance should be national in scope, although the several states should meet at least a large portion of the cost of management, leaving to the federal government the responsibility of investing, maintaining and safeguarding the funds constituting the necessary insurance reserves.

I have commenced to make, with the greatest of care, the necessary actuarial and other studies necessary for the formulation of plans for the consideration of the 74th Congress.

These three great objectives -- the security of the home, the security of livelihood, and the security of social insurance

are, it seems to me, a minimum of the promise that we can offer to the American people. They constitute a right which belongs to every individual and every family willing to work. They are the essential fulfillment of measures already taken toward relief, recovery and reconstruction.

This seeking for a greater measure of welfare and happiness does not indicate a change in values. It is rather a return to values lost in the course of our economic development and expansion.

Ample scope is left for the exercise of private initiative. In fact, in the process of recovery, I am greatly hoping that repeated promises that private investment and private initiative to relieve the government in the immediate future of much of the burden it has assumed will be fulfilled. We have not imposed undue restrictions upon business. We have not opposed the incentive of reasonable and legitimate private profit. We have sought rather to enable certain aspects of business to regain the confidence of the public. We have sought to put forward the rule of fair play in finance and industry.

It is true that there are a few among us who would still go back. These few offer no substitute for the gains already made, nor any hope for making future gains for human happiness. They loudly assert that individual liberty is being restricted by government, but when they are asked what individual liberties they have lost, they are put to it to answer.

We must dedicate ourselves anew to a recovery of the old and sacred possessive rights for which mankind has constantly

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struggled — home, livelihood, and individual security. The road to these values is the way of progress. Neither you nor I will rest content until we have done our utmost to move further on that road.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

THE WHITE HOUSE,

June 8, 1934.

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

draft

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ciation ^{of the} ~~of your~~ cooperation, ^{through which} ~~has~~ ^{has} ~~been~~ ^{been} ~~secured~~ ^{secured} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~effectiveness~~ ^{effectiveness}.

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Our task of reconstruction does not require the creation of new and strange values. It is rather the finding of the way once more to known, but to some degree forgotten, ideals and values. If the means and details are in some instances new, the objectives are as permanent as ~~a~~ ^Q human nature. Among our objectives I place the security of the men, women and children of the Nation first.

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In a simple and primitive civilization homes were to be had for the building. ~~When~~ The bounties of nature in a new land provided crude but adequate food and shelter. When land failed, our ancestors moved on to better land. It was always possible to push back the frontier, but ~~the frontier has now disappeared.~~ Our task involves the making of a better living out of the lands that we have. So also, security was attained in the earlier days through the interdependence of members of families upon each other and of the families within a small community upon each other. The complexities of great communities and of organized industry make less real these simple means of security. Therefore, we are compelled to employ the active interest of the Nation as a whole through government in order to encourage a greater security for each individual who composes it.

~~Spencer~~
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live as Americans should.
~~to have a decent place to live in~~

In regard to the second factor, economic circumstances and the forces of nature themselves dictate the need of constant thought as to the means by which a wise government may help the necessary readjustment of the population. We cannot fail to act when hundreds of thousands of families live ~~in localities~~ where there is no reasonable prospect of ~~conditions which will allow them to earn~~ a living in the years to come.

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This is ~~peculiarly~~ a national problem. Unlike most of the leading Nations of the world, we have so far failed to create a national policy for the development of our land and water resources and for their better use by those people who cannot make a living in their present positions. Only thus can we permanently eliminate many millions of people from the relief rolls on which their names ^{are} now found.

The extent of the usefulness of our great natural inheritance of land and water depends on our mastery of it. We are now so organized that science and invention have given us the means of more extensive and effective attacks upon the problems of nature than ever before. We have learned to utilize water power, to reclaim deserts, to recreate forests and to redirect the flow of population. Until recently we have proceeded *almost at random* ~~haphazardly~~, making many mistakes.

There are many illustrations of the necessity for ^{such} ~~rational~~ planning.

Some sections of the Northwest and Southwest which formerly existed as grazing land, were spread over with a fair crop of grass. On this land the water table lay a dozen or twenty feet below the surface, and newly arrived settlers put this land under the plow. Wheat was grown by dry farming methods. But in many of these places today the water table under the land has dropped to fifty or sixty feet below the surface and the top soil in dry seasons is blown away like driven snow. Falling rain, in the absence of grass roots, filters through ~~through~~ the soil, runs off the surface, or is quickly reabsorbed into the atmosphere. Many million acres of such land must be restored to grass or trees if we are to prevent a new and man-made Sahara.

At the other extreme, there are regions originally arid, which have been generously irrigated by human engineering. But in some of these places the hungry soil has not only absorbed the water necessary to produce magnificent crops, but so much more water that the water table has now risen to the point of saturation, thereby threatening the future crops upon which many families depend. ⁷ Human knowledge is great enough today to give us assurance of success in carrying through the abandonment of many millions of acres for agricultural use and the replacing of these acres with others on which at least a living can be earned.

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The White House
June 8, 1934.

June 9, 1934.

STATEMENTS FILE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

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FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE

June 8, 1934.