
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. 741

1934 October 19

Roanoke, VA - Dedication of Veterans' Hospital

ADDRESS MADE BY THE PRESIDENT
AT VETERANS' HOSPITAL
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA.
OCT. 19, 1934.

Roanoke Speech -

In coming to Roanoke to take part in the dedication of the latest addition to our chain of veterans hospitals, I do not seek to enumerate or to catalogue the many steps which have been taken by your Federal Government to care for its veterans of many wars. Most of you in this great audience are from this neighborhood and in the years to come the men who will occupy this hospital will be your friends and your neighbors. I commend them to your care.

You see before you today a monument which is representative of the national policy of your Government that its disabled and sick veterans shall be accorded the best treatment which medical and surgical science can supply.

In a larger sense these buildings are a symbol of the broader policy that the Government is seeking to give aid not only to veterans but also to hundreds of thousands of other citizens -- men and women and children who, handicapped by

environment or by circumstance, lack today what reasonable people call the essentials of modern civilization.

For many years we have seen a constantly growing realization of the fact that any large or small group which lacks the elementary necessities of proper food, of decent housing, of adequate medical attention, of essential education, drags down the level of the country as a whole and retards its progress. *Spent of that cannot exist apart of standard life.*

In one sense these men and women and children are not forgotten people for the very good reason that we have known of their existence and appreciated their plight for many years. In another sense, however, they have been forgotten for it is only in recent years that Government has undertaken to help them on a national scale.

The further we go in our survey to find out who

these people are and where they live, the more appalled I am by the magnitude of our task. Most of us know in general terms of the slum conditions which exist in many of our cities. Most of us know, from hearsay at least, of people who have lived for generations in back eddies remote from the active stream of life. But we have failed to realize the existence of the under-privileged who are present and largely forgotten in practically every one of the more than three thousand counties of the forty-eight States of the Union.

The improvement of their hard lot is a definite obligation on all of our citizens and I am confident that the veterans of our American wars will be among the first to recognize this fact.

The improvement of their hard lot compels our

immediate exertions, not only because of the individual human beings who suffer today, but, even more important to the future of America, because future generations of American citizens will become the descendants of those who are now in need. In this thought also the veterans of our wars will go along.

Let it be well remembered that the hundreds of thousands of men and women and children to whom I have referred, scattered throughout our Nation, have no splendid hospitals for their care, have no medical attention, such as we will provide here, have no good food and decent raiment such as will be provided in this Veterans home; have no opportunities for adequate education, and can but suffer the ills of their lives according to their own individual circumstances.

You have heard it said that we must restore prosperity. You have heard some kind people say that the country is distinctly better off from a material point of view than it was last year. I am inclined to agree with them. Other people, who fail to think things through, forget that one cause of the depression which we are beginning to leave behind, was the very existence of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who have been and continue to be a definite drag against the return of prosperity.

It must remain our constant objective to eliminate the causes of depression and the drags on prosperity. It will cost money to do this. In the spending of this money we must have due regard for the good credit of the Government of the United States. That means that we cannot spend at once or in any given year all that we could usefully spend.

I mentioned once upon a time that we must do first things first; the care of the disabled, the sick, the destitute and the starving is the first thing. To this the Veterans of American Wars give their approval in agreement with the overwhelming majority of our other citizens.

I make this statement in regard to the Veterans of America not only because I am confident of their patriotism and their understanding of our national needs, but also for two other reasons. The first is that our Federal Government and our State Governments have given to them many privileges not accorded to other citizens, and the other reason is that it has been amply demonstrated that the Veterans of the World War, today in the prime of life, are better off from the point of view of employment and of annual income than the average of

any other great group of our citizens.

Let these facts, let this great monument -- this Veterans Hospital and the other institutions of their kind throughout the country -- serve as a symbolic and bold denial of any careless statement that the United States does not take care of those who have served it in war -- and as a symbolic affirmance of our belief in the underlying patriotic willingness of our Veterans to put first things first.

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE DEDICATION OF THE VETERANS HOSPITAL
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA
October 19, 1934

Governor Perry, Mr. Chairman, my friends:

I could not have failed to receive inspiration during this past hour -- the generous welcome that so many of you good people have given me since I got off the train in Roanoke, my motor trip out here and now, at the end, the coming to this hospital site, the view of these magnificent buildings and, almost more than anything else, I think, the glorious hills, this lovely country of Virginia. (Applause)

And I am honored, too, in the escort that you have given, the Virginia National Guard, these young men from two schools which are known throughout the length and breadth of the land, V. M. I. and V. P. I. (Applause)

(The foregoing was all extemporaneous.)

But in coming (to Roanoke) here today, in coming to take part in the dedication of the latest addition to our chain of veterans hospitals, I do not seek to enumerate or to catalogue the many steps which have been taken

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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country of Virginia. (Applause)

And I am honored, too, in the report that you

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(The foregoing was all extemporaneous.)

But in coming (to Roanoke) here today, in coming

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our chain of veterans hospitals, I do not seek to enumer-

ate up to catalogue the many steps which have been taken

by your Federal Government to care for its veterans of many wars, -- generous steps, fine steps, and of late years, adequate steps.

Most of you in this great audience are from this neighborhood and in the years to come you will see how your Government treats the men who have served it, treats the men who will occupy this hospital. They will be your friends and your neighbors. I commend them to your care, and I am very certain that you will give it to them.

You see before you today a monument which is a very definite representation (representative) of the national policy of your Government that its disabled and sick veterans shall be accorded the best treatment which medical and surgical science can possibly supply.

In a larger sense these buildings are a symbol of the broader policy, the policy that the Government is seeking to give aid not only to the veterans of its wars but also to hundreds of thousands of other citizens -- men, women and children who are handicapped by environment or by circumstance and are lacking today in what reasonable people call the essentials of modern civilization.

For a great many years we have seen a constantly growing realization of the fact that any large or small group in any community which lacks the elementary necessities of proper food, of decent housing, of adequate medical attention, of essential education, those groups drag down the level of the whole country, those groups of necessity retard the progress of the whole country. It is just the same thought, to put it into naval terms, that the speed of a fleet is the speed of the slowest vessel in the fleet. Or, to put it in military terms, the speed of an army is the speed of the slowest unit comprising that army.

In one sense these men and women and children that I am talking about are not forgotten people -- I believe you have heard that phrase before -- (applause) in one sense they are not forgotten people for the very good reason that we have known of their existence and we appreciate their plight (for many years). But, in another sense they have been forgotten, for it has only been in recent years that Government, as such, has undertaken to help them on a national scale.

The further we go in our survey to find out who these people are and where they live, the more appalled I

am by the magnitude of our task. Most of us know in general terms of the slum conditions which exist in many of the cities of America. Most of us know, from hearsay (at least) or from personal knowledge, of people who have lived for generations in back eddies remote from the active stream of life. But, I think, we have failed to realize the existence of these underprivileged people who are present and largely forgotten in practically every single one of the more than three thousand counties that make up (of) the forty-eight States of the Union.

The improvement of their hard lot -- for they exist in every community -- is a definite obligation on all of our citizens and I am confident that the veterans of our American wars will be among the first to recognize this fact.

The improvement of their hard lot compels our immediate exertions, not only because of the individual human beings who are suffering today, that is bad enough, but, also we are impelled to help them because future generations of American citizens will become the descendants of those who are now in need. In this thought also the veterans of our wars will go along.

Let it be well remembered that the hundreds of thousands of men and women and children to whom I have referred, scattered throughout our Nation, have no splendid hospitals for their care, have no medical attention, such as will be provided in this Veterans home; have no opportunities for adequate education, and can but suffer the ills of their lives according to their own individual circumstances.

You have heard it said that we must restore prosperity. You have heard some kind people say that the country is distinctly better off from a material point of view than it was last year. I am inclined to agree with them. (Applause) But, other people, who fail to think things through, forget that one cause of the depression which we are beginning to leave behind, was the very existence of (hundreds of thousands) millions of men, women and children who have been and continue to be a definite drag against the return of prosperity.

It must remain our constant objective to eliminate the causes of depression and the drags on prosperity. It must be our constant objective to do what we can to

raise these people up to a higher standard of living, to a better chance in life. It will cost money to do it. In the spending of this money, it goes without saying that we must have due regard for the good credit of the Government of the United States. That, my friends, means that we can not spend at once or in any given year all that we could possibly spend.

I mentioned once upon a time that we must do first things first; the care of the disabled, the sick, the destitute and the starving in all ranks of our population -- that, my friends, is the first thing. To this the Veterans of American Wars give their approval in agreement with the overwhelming majority of our other citizens.

I make this statement in regard to the Veterans of America because I believe in them, because I am confident of their patriotism, because of their understanding of our national needs, and I make it because of two other reasons: The first is that our Federal Government and our State Governments have given to them many privileges not accorded to other citizens, and the other reason is that it has been amply demonstrated that the Veterans of the World War, today in the prime of life, are better off

on the average, from the point of view of employment and of annual income than the average of any other great group of our citizens, and that is why I know they will go along with my thought of caring first for the great masses of people in this country who are crying for care and who need it today. (Applause)

So, my friends, as I look out on these beautiful mountains, I cannot help feeling that we should let these facts about our country, together with this great monument -- this Veterans Hospital and all the other institutions of their kind throughout the country -- that we should let all of them serve as a symbolic and bold denial of any careless statement that the United States does not take care of those who have served it in war, but, more than that I should like to have this monument and all the others throughout the length and breadth of the land serve as a symbolic affirmation of our American belief in the underlying patriotic willingness of everybody in the country, Veterans, non-Veterans, men, women and children -- their underlying patriotic willingness to put first things first.

That is the way of American progress and this symbol, which we dedicate today, will live all through the

years to remind us that we are going to make progress in
an American way. (Prolonged applause)

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT AT THE DEDICATION
OF THE VETERANS HOSPITAL AT ROANOKE, VIRGINIA,
ON OCTOBER 19, 1934.

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In coming to Roanoke to take part in the dedication of the latest addition to our chain of veterans hospitals, I do not seek to enumerate or to catalogue the many steps which have been taken by your Federal Government to care for its veterans of many wars.

Most of you in this great audience are from this neighborhood and in the years to come the men who will occupy this hospital will be your friends and your neighbors. I commend them to your care.

You see before you today a monument which is representative of the national policy of your Government that its disabled and sick veterans shall be accorded the best treatment which medical and surgical science can supply.

In a larger sense these buildings are a symbol of the broader policy that the Government is seeking to give aid not only to veterans but also to hundreds of thousands of other citizens -- men, and women and children who, handicapped by environment or by circumstance, lack today what reasonable people call the essentials of modern civilization.

For many years we have seen a constantly growing realization of the fact that any large or small group which lacks the elementary necessities of proper food, of decent housing, of adequate medical attention, of essential education, drags down the level of the country as a whole and retards its progress.

In one sense these men and women and children are not forgotten people for the very good reason that we have known of their existence and appreciated their plight for many years. In another sense, however, they have been forgotten for it is only in recent years that Government has undertaken to help them on a national scale.

The further we go in our survey to find out who these people are and where they live, the more appalled I am by the magnitude of our task. Most of us know in general terms of the slum conditions which exist in many of our cities. Most of us know, from hearsay at least, of people who have lived for generations in back eddies remote from the active stream of life. But we have failed to realize the existence of the under-privileged who are present and largely forgotten in practically every one of the more than three thousand counties of the forty-eight States of the Union.

The improvement of their hard lot is a definite obligation on all of our citizens and I am confident that the veterans of our American wars will be among the first to recognize this fact.

The improvement of their hard lot compels our immediate exertions, not only because of the individual human beings who suffer today, but, even more important to the future of America, because future generations of American citizens will become the descendants of those who are now in need. In this thought also the veterans of our wars will go along.

Let it be well remembered that the hundreds of thousands of men and women and children to whom I have referred, scattered throughout our Nation, have no splendid hospitals for their care, have no medical attention, such as we will provide here, have no good food and decent raiment such as will be provided in this Veterans home; have no opportunities for adequate education, and can but suffer the ills of their lives according to their own individual circumstances.

You have heard it said that we must restore prosperity. You have heard some kind people say that the country is distinctly better off from a material point of view than it was last year. I am inclined to agree with them. Other people, who fail to think things through, forget that one cause of the depression which we are beginning to leave behind, was the very existence of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who have been and continue to be a definite drag against the return of prosperity.

It must remain our constant objective to eliminate the causes of depression and the drags on prosperity. It will cost money to do this. In the spending of this money we must have due regard for the good credit of the Government of the United States. That means that we cannot spend at once or in any given year all that we could usefully spend.

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This address of the President at the dedication of the Veterans Hospital at Roanoke, Virginia, on October 13, 1934, MUST be held in confidence until released.

STEPHEN EARLE

Assistant Secretary to the President

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WILSON EARLY
Assistant Secretary to the President

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