

September 14, 1935

[Dedication of White Face Memorial Highway]

FDR Speech File

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEDICATION OF THE
WHITE FACE MEMORIAL HIGHWAY
ON TOP OF WHITE FACE MOUNTAIN (NEAR LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK)
September 14, 1935, 12 o'clock Noon

(The ceremonies took place at an elevation of 4600 feet, overlooking a beautiful view covering, if I recall it correctly, the northern part of the Adirondacks clear up to the Canadian border.)

The ceremonies were opened by Chairman Anderson representing the White Face Memorial Highway Commission, who introduced Governor Lehman. Governor Lehman introduced Judge Shibling, head of the American Legion of the Department of the State of New York. Chairman Anderson then introduced the President.)

Governor Lehman, Colonel Anderson, men and women of the World War:

What I have seen today in this wonderful drive makes me more enthusiastic about four little words than I ever have been before. Those four short words are these, "it can be done." (Applause)

Back in 1917, when the United States entered the World War, within a few weeks after April 6, 1917, we received in Washington two delegations of military and naval and civilian officials, one from France and the other from England. Little preparation had been made by this country

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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 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.

The original book was at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

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World War, within a few weeks after April 6, 1917, we had
collected in Washington two delegations of soldiers and sailors
and civilian officials, one from France and the other from
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before actually entering into the War and there were many theories as to what part the United States should play. I happened to be present in those days at a conference by these visitors with the President of the United States and the leaders of our Army and Navy. We had thought up to that time in terms of entering the War -- some kind of a war -- and of putting half a million men into the field. The preparations of the General Staff of the Army and of the Navy had never visualized a war that would call for more than perhaps a million men.

But, through April 1917, we saw, having entered the War, the necessity of winning the War -- at least of helping our associated and allied countries in winning the War -- and I remember old Marshal Joffre, in the conference, asking the President of the United States how many men America could furnish, and I remember very well the reply of our President. "You will have, Marshal Joffre, a million men, and if you need two million men you will have two million men, and if you need five million men you will have five million men and, if you need the entire man-power, you will have the entire man-power of America." And, then he used those four words, "it can be done." (Applause)

Actually, as you know, nearly five million men were under arms in the Army and Navy. And, if it had been necessary, we would have supplied five million more to help win that War. Wilson said, "it can be done", and it was done.

Later on, I had the privilege of seeing many of those men at the front, both on the waters and also on the fields of Belgium and of France. Knowing those men at the front, I am very certain in my own mind that there is no more fitting tribute to them that we in the State of New York could dedicate than this great Memorial Highway to the peak of one of the highest mountains of our State.

Those men who served in the War, whether abroad or at home, were thinking of the future of their Nation. The Governor has well said that this Memorial will outlast any structure of bricks or mortar, any building, any archway, any other tribute that we could possibly create, because this Highway will last, not for generations, but for the centuries to come. Furthermore, it is not a mere tablet, not a mere building that serves some useful purpose and is seen by many people. It is something more than that. This Highway will enter into the lives of our generation

and future generations more usefully, I believe, than anything else that we could have created.

Back in those days when there were "doubting Thomases", when we were talking about this tribute, they said, some of them, "Let us keep the mountains of the Adirondacks for those who seek to get close to nature, who want to climb to the highest peak on foot, who want to camp." Yet you and I know that it is only a comparatively small proportion of our population that can indulge in the luxury of camping and hiking. Even those who engage in it are going to get, some day, to the age of life when they will no longer be able to climb on their own two feet to the tops of mountains. So, for them as they get older, and also for the millions of people who have not got the facilities or the possibilities of walking up to the top of our great mountain, we have provided one mountain that they can go to on four wheels. (Applause)

A far greater proportion of the population of our State and of those who visit us from other states will be served on their holidays and vacations, on their camping trips, than if this Highway had not been built. I like to think that we have done something here that will

serve the pleasure and the good of the people of this country more than anything else that we could have done.

As to the Highway itself, I can only repeat to you a remark that was made to me about a month ago by a distinguished French engineer. He had driven to the top of this road and when he came to Washington he said to me, "I, of course, know all of the great mountain highways of Europe. There is no highway in all of Europe which can compare for its engineering skill, for its perfection of detail, with the White Face Mountain Highway of the State of New York." (Applause)

I have been told various stories. This being my first trip, I had to verify them. I had been told it would be necessary to wear red flannels on top of the Mountain. Well, on this beautiful day you and I know that that is not true. I had been told that you could see Lake Champlain and I believed it, and there it is before my eyes. But I had been told two other things that I did not believe. I had been told that I could see the St. Lawrence River and from over there (indicating) in that car, I could see it through binoculars and over there (indicating) it is. I was told that I could

see Mount Kelly (?) and that, too, I have seen through the binoculars today.

I know the United States fairly well, I think, and I was interested in a remark that Colonel Anderson made to me on the way up, which I can verify, I think, knowing our Western friends. A man from Denver came up the Mountain the other day and when he came down, Colonel Anderson asked him what he thought of it. And he said, "Well, I am from Denver, and we have got a road up Pike's Peak, so I cannot tell you, coming from Denver and Pike's Peak, that this is finer than that, but I am able to tell you, knowing all the mountains of the East, that there is nothing in the Eastern part of the United States that touches White Face." (Applause)

Yes, it is a great sight, one hundred and thirty-seven lakes that can be seen from the top of the Mountain. You can see the whole range of the Adirondacks. Think of being able to see the Adirondacks, all of them, for a dollar. (Laughter) People are going to come here, my friends, and it is up to us, the citizens of the State of New York, to tell all of our neighbors in the forty-seven other states that they have got to come and see this Mountain and not go

back home without seeing it. To me, this is one of the finest things that the State of New York has ever done.

I bear tribute to Colonel Greene, to the Commission, and especially to all the men who have been engaged in this great work. It has not only been magnificently engineered, but it has been run within the bounds of cost. That is a great thing these days, and it is going to pay for itself.

And so, my friends, I am very happy to be here. I wish very much that it were possible for me to walk up the few remaining feet to the actual top of the Mountain. Some day they are going to make it possible for people who cannot make the little climb to go up there in a comfortable and easy elevator.

So, once more, let me tell you how happy I have been on this day of dedication and let me tell you of the World War, men and women, that I believe this is a tribute from the citizens of the State of New York which would be appreciated by those fallen comrades of ours who served their State and their Nation so well. It is fitting that we should dedicate it in their names. It will stand as a tribute to them through all the centuries to come. (Prolonged applause)