

October 16, 1935

[5th Annual Woman's Conference - NYC]

FOR Speech File

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE FIFTH ANNUAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE  
ON CURRENT PROBLEMS, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

(From the U.S.S. Houston)

October 16, 1935

Note: The President's message was read for him by Mrs. Roosevelt. It would have been delivered by the President, had radio facilities permitted, from the ship. Facilities for radio broadcasting from ships at sea, as distant from New York as the Houston, could not be guaranteed by radio engineers who feared a satisfactory reception of the message in New York would not be possible. Consequently it was arranged for the President to send the message to Mrs. Roosevelt for delivery.

"The meetings which you are holding are an excellent reminder of the very important fact that education in its broader sense begins only after formal school education is finished. Henry Adams, a great American, suggests, in the title of his autobiography, that a man's education is a continuing thing throughout his life. Especially is this true of education in public affairs, to which you so wisely turn your attention.

"There was never a time in the history of this country when an examination of the fundamental principles on the basis of which our public affairs are conducted was more important. Great and significant questions face us on all sides. We do well to take counsel with respect to these by a fair public presentation of varying points of view.

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 temporarily 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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"This is particularly true with respect to the women of America. Their interest in these great questions is rooted deep in the conditions of their own lives. When our economic system fails to sustain an adequate standard of life, it is the women who face the most poignant privation. A falling standard in the incomes of average Americans, the dragging of innocent children from homes into factories, the problems of delinquency that arise from social conditions, the destruction of workers' morale by unemployment, the effects of poverty and dependency in old age, widespread preventable diseases, unnecessary industrial warfare, and, most of all, that failure of reason which permits and wages modern war -- all of these challenging factors in modern society throw upon the women of the nation a material and spiritual burden of the greatest significance. That is why the women of America, as their responsibilities of citizenship have greatly expanded, are turning with intense earnestness to measures which are aimed at eliminating or alleviating the effects of these imperfections of our society. They recognize, as all reasonable people must recognize, that government was not instituted to serve merely as a cold public instrument to be called into use after irreparable damage has been done. If we limit government to the functions of merely punishing the criminal after crimes have been

committed, of gathering up the wreckage of society after the devastation of an economic collapse, or of fighting a war that reason might have prevented, then government fails to satisfy those urgent human purposes, which, in essence, gave it its beginning and provide its present justification.

"Modern government has become an instrument through which citizens may apply their reasoned methods of prevention in addition to methods of correction. Government has become one of the most important instruments for the prevention and cure of these evils of society which I have mentioned. Its concern at the moment is unabated. It conceives of itself as an instrument through which social justice may prevail more greatly among men. In the determination of the standards that make up social justice, the widest discussion is necessary. In the last analysis, government can be no more than the collective wisdom of its citizens. The duty of citizens is to increase this collective wisdom by common counsel, by the discovery and consideration of facts relating to the common life, and by the discouragement of those who for selfish ends or through careless speech distort facts and disseminate untruth.

"In facing the problems involved in a world in which international discord still stalks abroad, the vivid

interests of women in the preservation of safe peace should be enlisted. Constant vigilance is necessary in a nation like ours, to see that forces that make for discord are discovered and discouraged. I have pledged myself to do my part in keeping America free of those entanglements that move us along the road to war. I want to feel at all times that I have the sustaining influence of a healthy, sound, and, above all, thoroughly American Public opinion on the subject. My task and the task of all those others who are associated with me in the official life of the country can be made easier if the citizenship of the nation and particularly the women citizens of the nation seek the truth and a wise application of the truth.

"I had hoped to be able to speak to you in person by radio but my flagship is in the Pacific Ocean south of the Panama Canal and the problems of adequate transmission make this impossible. Therefore I can but extend you my greetings and my regrets that I am unable personally to participate in the valuable discussions of your most excellent meeting."

October 16, 1935

HOLD FOR RELEASEHOLD FOR RELEASEHOLD FOR RELEASE

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**CAUTION:** The following message to the Fifth Annual Women's Conference on Current Problems, meeting in New York City, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, has been sent by the President from the U. S. S. Houston, and MUST BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE until released. Release, upon delivery, expected about 9:30 o'clock P.M., Thursday, October 17th.

**NOTE:** Please safeguard against premature release.

STEPHEN EARLY  
Assistant Secretary to the President

The President's message reads:

To the Fifth Annual Women's Conference on Current Problems,  
New York, New York.

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"There was never a time in the history of this country when an examination of the fundamental principles on the basis of which our public affairs are conducted was more important. Great and significant questions face us on all sides. We do well to take counsel with respect to these by a fair public presentation of varying points of view.

"This is particularly true with respect to the women of America. Their interest in these great questions is rooted deep in the conditions of their own lives. When our economic system fails to sustain an adequate standard of life, it is the women who face the most poignant privation. A falling standard in the incomes of average Americans, the dragging of innocent children from homes into factories, the problems of delinquency that arise from social conditions, the destruction of workers' morale by unemployment, the effects of poverty and dependency in old age, widespread preventable diseases, unnecessary industrial warfare, and, most of all, that failure of reason which permits and wages modern war - all of these challenging factors in modern society throw upon the women of the nation a material and spiritual burden of the greatest significance. That is why the women of America, as their responsibilities of citizenship have greatly expanded, are turning with intense earnestness to measures which are aimed at eliminating or alleviating the effects of these imperfections of our society. They recognize, as all reasonable people must recognize, that government was not instituted to serve merely as a cold public instrument to be called into use after irreparable damage has been done. If we limit government to the functions of merely punishing the criminal after crimes have been committed, of gathering up the wreckage of society after the devastation of an economic collapse, or of fighting a war that reason might have prevented, then government fails to satisfy those urgent human purposes, which, in essence, gave it its beginning and provide its present justification.

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FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT."

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OWEN D. LARLY  
Assistant Secretary to the President