

September 23, 1936

Herald Tribune Forum

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(Speech made over radio at  
Hyde Park)

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SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT  
HERALD TRIBUNE FORUM  
SEPTEMBER 23, 1936.

Anything that makes for tolerance of opinion and contributes to the general education of our people in the issues of governmental policy is of vast value. Therefore, I like the Forum idea. May we have more of them and cover the country with them.

It is not likely that such a brief expression of a point of view as is possible on such an occasion as this, will persuade the convinced political partisan to change his or her position, but it may start such people to thinking, and convey the idea that prejudice is a rather weak substitute for logic in determining the questions that are of such vital consequence to our country as a whole and to each individual citizen thereof.

It is natural, I suppose, in a campaign year, for advocates and adversaries of any policy or process of government to relapse into exaggeration and invective, and so becloud the

controversy as to make it possible for the future of the country to be determined in rancor and temper instead of by calm deliberation and clear thinking.

I don't know that there is any actual remedy for this state of affairs, but I believe that it is within the power and the province of the press to make whatever improvement is possible. I do not think that anybody objects to a statement of opinion or an argument, either pro or con, being put forth in the editorial pages, provided the editorials do not contain misstatements of fact. That, unless I entirely misunderstand newspaper psychology, is what the newspaper editorial columns are for. I do not believe -- and I do not think any disagreement is possible on this subject -- that a journal's news columns ought to be tampered with, either by coloring news or by leaving out news. The news is the commodity that is marketed to the whole people. I may be accused of idealism when I suggest that a Republican reader of a Democratic newspaper is entitled to all the news that appertains to his segment of the political

landscape and that a Democratic reader of a Republican newspaper should not be fed exclusively on a Republican diet. And I would apply the same idealism to the headlines.

The Forum idea, conducted impartially, is an indication of the objective which most fair-minded people seek. I cannot help but contrast a nation which more and more is encouraging any friendly discussion on all manner of public problems with those countries which unfortunately have made public discussion difficult if not impossible.

In the welter of passion which is apparently still inseparable from our political campaigns, you and I hear about the liberty of the press -- regimentation of the press against the government and regimentation of the press by the government. It is doubtful if the United States ever had an Administration, since the days when Washington was accused of despotism and aspirations to kingship that had the slightest desire to muzzle anybody. The unchecked virulence of assaults on almost every Administration since the beginning of our history in itself is best proof of that statement.

An old friend of mine who, although a successful man of affairs in New York, has led a somewhat narrow existence, <sup>wrote me</sup> ~~asked me~~ <sup>to ask</sup> the other day if it was true, as many of his friends had told him, that three-quarters of all the money spent for relief of the needy unemployed in these past few years had gone for overhead and only one-quarter to the needy unemployed themselves. He asked me further if it was true, as he had been told by his friends, that all our bank deposits were insecure and our insurance policies worthless. I wrote him that it would be best for him to look up the answers himself. I suggested that he attend your Forum yesterday and today. I hope he has been with you, *- for his own sake -*

The time may come when the policies of the Nation will be determined with a serenity and logic that any serious business problem is decided among the directors of the business, but I must reluctantly confess that we have not reached that day.

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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT  
to the  
New York Herald-Tribune Forum  
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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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TELEGRAM

*Hesselt*

The White House

Washington WX 9-23-36.

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Memo. for M.H.M.

Suggested draft for Herald Tribune Forum address:

This great Republic was instituted to secure to its inhabitants the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

For a century and a half it has sought the fulfillment of its ideals through carrying out the wishes of its citizens, as made manifest by unmistakable evidences of their attitude upon public questions, and as expressed by their chosen representatives. A nation is truly a Democracy only when it so obeys the voice of its people. To be assured that these commands issue from a source uncontaminated by unfair propaganda, misrepresentation or self-interest, America demands that no individual and no group venture to influence the determination of its people by artifice or chicanery. Public scorn is quick to punish any recreancy to this principle. The greatest safeguard to our future lies in a sound understanding by our people of the important current governmental issues. Worthwhile public servants support every agency that offers opportunity for the wide dissemination of facts and opinions upon public questions. The obligation is upon the Press, the Radio and the Rostrum to cooperate in making it possible for every man and woman to obtain a proper perspective from which questions important to all may be viewed. This objective is furthered by Forums, such as this, whose courtesy gives me the opportunity of talking to you this evening. From their operation culture will become more general. Knowledge will be increased.

## TELEGRAM

### The White House Washington

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As conditions change, the need for wider discussion increases. This country is no longer a sparsely settled continent wherein isolated individuals or communities follow their occupations free from contacts with others of their kind or unaffected by conditions outside their immediate community. Instead, we are a unified nation, our interests inter-laced with those of others hundreds of miles away. This does not change the attitude of the Government toward the individual. ~~None~~ He remains the first object of its solicitude; his welfare its chief concern. It does change the means by which he may be best served. Since action of his government will directly affect his life, he is entitled to direct what that action shall be. No greater injustice could be done him, than to leave him without aid in the contest with forces whose origin and purpose are beyond his control. To make intelligent decisions, he must appraise the complicated factors of modern life. Fair argument increases his power to reach correct conclusions.

The mere fact that we are approaching a political campaign should not be permitted to obscure the necessity for tolerant consideration of the issues. There are some so partisan in their attitude that it is useless to expect from them any judgment other than that dictated by their preconceptions. Fortunately these are a minority. The appeal of reason will influence the others. Every thinking man knows that in our life there are inequities to be adjusted, evils to be eliminated and certain

## TELEGRAM

### The White House Washington

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ideals of social justice to be attained. We are anxious to press towards the accomplishment of these purposes but recognize that success may be achieved only by public consent to and support of the means necessary to gain their realization. Those means must accord with the spirit and form of our government. As more people comprehend the objectives, the more surely will advances be made. We do not progress by mere "doing." Our activities must be ~~strictly~~ wisely directed towards definite ends.

Since an informed public opinion is the surest basis for proper conclusions, we turn for help instinctively towards those channels which place before the people the material which enables them to make up their own minds as to their wishes. They are entitled to the advice of those who have given the most careful study to the questions. Fortunately, this information is available.

It seems clear that agreement has been reached as to the desirability of assistance to agriculture. We are one in the belief that endeavors of the farmers, through their own cooperatives alone, will not be completely effective in furnishing them a standard of living comparable to that in other occupations and will not result in the maintenance of a farm group adequately efficient to supply the food needs of the consuming centers. Consequently, there is substantial unanimity that food, feed and fibre production and the maintenance of soil fertility are entitled to assistance from the government. Likewise no one questions that those large sections of our population,

## TELEGRAM

### The White House Washington

which are exposed to the vicissitudes of industrial disagreements, are entitled to protection from wholly arbitrary interferences with their rights as citizens to organize peacefully to maintain those rights. Nor or is it seriously contended that the dangers of old age and unemployment are no concern of government. We seek to avoid the recurrence of the tragic experiences of recent years. A similar conclusion has been reached, as to the exploitation of the consumer and investor, by that minority of so-called business men, who forgot in their greed for profit, their obligations to the people whom they served.

As our citizens, grow in knowledge of the aims of government, they will become more interested in its processes; better advised as to their own attitude. They look forward to the America of the future. They are charitable towards the imperfections, realizing that progress is not always along a smooth and easy road. Well advised as to the difficulties, our people will be satisfied, with honest, intelligent efforts to attain the goal for which America was founded, the Freedom and Happiness of the People.

(End)

S.T.E.



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An old friend of mine who, although a successful man of affairs in New York, has led a somewhat narrow existence, asked me the other day if it was true, as many of his friends had told him, that three-quarters of all the money spent for relief of the needy unemployed in these past few years had gone for overhead and only one-quarter to the needy unemployed themselves. He asked me further if it was true, as he had been told by his friends, that all our bank deposits were insecure and our insurance policies worthless. I wrote

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The time may come, ~~perhaps~~, when the policies of the Nation will be determined with a serenity and logic that any serious business problem is decided among the directors of ~~the~~ business, but I must reluctantly confess that we have not reached that day.

I wish I might have attended the Forum in person. If I had been with you, I might have been moved to take part in the discussion. My part, in such a case, would at least have been tempered by good humor, an effort to develop the facts, and a desire to present constructive remedies for current ills. I send <sup>my</sup> compliments and good wishes.

I do think that this condition is being corrected and that more and more newspapers are inclined to give both sides at least a partial showing. This Forum is an indication of the advance to which I have referred.

As you know, quite a number of our ambassadors and ministers from abroad have been in the United States recently, and I had an opportunity to talk with them and so get a very vivid picture of what is happening in the foreign world. I cannot help but contrast a nation in which an important partisan newspaper features a debate, with no strings on the debaters, with those countries in which whatever government dominates, directs the papers, controls the radio and otherwise keeps its hand on all the organs of information. It would not only be impossible for such a discussion as we are indulging in to occur in almost any foreign country you choose to name, but it is unthinkable that anybody would even suggest it.

In the welter of passion which is apparently inseparable from our political campaigns, you of course hear of subversive attempts to infringe on the liberty of the press, to establish censorship, and generally to regiment all of the vehicles of public expression. I cannot recall a campaign in which such changes were not made against whatever party was in office. Nor can I recall any such incident that had a reasonable basis. We are not only the

freest country in the world in regard to the untrammelled expression of opinion, but we are the most fortunate country in the world in being spared the conditions which have forced other countries to handcuff its newspapers. Indeed, it is doubtful if the United States ever had an administration since the days when Washington was accused of despotism and aspirations to kingship, that had the slightest desire to muzzle anybody. The unchecked virulence of assaults on an administration since the beginning of our history, in itself is the best proof of that statement.

Nevertheless, I wonder whether all this fury of denunciation is a necessary element in our political life. I cannot find that it ever had an effect, for all the names that stand out brilliantly in our record of public servants, are those of men who in their time functioned through a deluge of defamation beside which the modern effort in the same direction seems like an April shower.

One is almost inclined to say, after reading what was written contemporaneously about Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson, that the villains of yesterday are all the heroes of today.

The time may come, I hope, when the policies of the country are determined with the serenity and logic that any serious business problem is decided among the directors of a corporation, but I must reluctantly confess that that time still seems afar.

Draft  
Michelson Herald Tribune Forum  
Sept 23/1936

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