

November 2, 1936

[Poughkeepsie, NY]

FDR Speech-File

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EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT POUGHKEEPSIE, DUTCHESS COUNTY, NEW YORK

November 2, 1936

My friends of Poughkeepsie: I was quite certain that John Mack (the President was introduced by Judge Mack) would pull something like that.

I was thinking this afternoon about the first political speech that I made in this city away back in 1910. And it was a terrible speech.

I decided not long after 1910 that I would never make another political speech in the City of Poughkeepsie for the very good reason that everybody knows me. And so, in spite of newspaper headlines -- and you and I have come to discriminate where they are concerned -- in spite of all that I am not going to make a political speech tonight. I am just going to tell you a few things that are on my chest and in my heart at the end of this campaign.

I have visited a great number of states. I have been in the South; I have been in the Middle West; I have been in the far west; I have been in New England. And I have never seen a political campaign in 25 years -- 26 years -- where I could feel inside of me that people all over the country were taking as great and as intelligent an interest in the problems of Government.

One of the good things that came out of the depression

Franklin D. Roosevelt Letter

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.

EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, NOVEMBER 2, 1931

My friends of Pennsylvania: I was quite certain that John Mack (the President was introduced by Judge Mack) would say something like that.

I was thinking this afternoon about the first political speech that I made in this city way back in 1910. And it was a terrible speech.

I decided not long after 1910 that I would never make another political speech in the City of Pennsylvania for the very good reason that everybody knows me. And so, in spite of newspaper headlines -- and you and I have some discriminations where they are concerned -- in spite of all that I am not going to make a political speech tonight. I am just going to tell you a few things that are on my chest and in my heart at the end of this campaign.

I have visited a great number of states. I have been in the South; I have been in the Middle West; I have been in the far west; I have been in New England. And I have never seen a political campaign in 25 years -- 26 years -- where I could feel inside of me that people all over the country were taking as great and as intelligent an interest in the problems of Government.

One of the good things that came out of the depression

was the fact that men and women, rich and poor, in every part of the country, have begun to study the future of America. They have been wondering whether we should do this, or that, or the other thing; and back of it all there has lain, so far as I can see, two very definite thoughts in people's minds. The first is to retain our American form of Government -- the democratic system, spelled with a small "d" -- the representative system of Government -- and the other thing that I have carried away with me in this campaign is the thought that people want progress; that there have been a great many things in the past that we did not do, that we did not arrive at, but that with a great deal of modern knowledge and modern experience the time has come in the United States to accomplish more things for the average citizen.

People in the past have gone along with the idea that we could do without a great many things such, for instance, as security. Well, "security" means a kind of feeling within our individual selves that we have lacked all through the course of history. We have had to take our chance about our old age in days past. We have had to take our chance with depressions and boom times. We have had to take a chance on our jobs. We have had to take a chance on buying our homes.

And I have believed for a great many years that the time has come in our civilization when a great many of

these chances should be eliminated from our lives.

It has not been so much a question of party politics. Most of us would have followed any responsible leader who could have shown to the people of this country that he would seek to eliminate at least some of those chances of life, some of those hardships that have come to a lot of people through no fault of their own.

I know conditions in this city and in this county pretty well. I have lived here for fifty-four years. And all through my life, ever since I have been of age to take any part in public affairs, which is at least a quarter of a century, I have been noticing a great many hardships that have affected the people of the City and the County. As I got older and was able to travel around the country I found that the same kind of hardships affected people in every other community and county and state.

And that is why, as some of you who know me can perhaps realize, I have tried for a good many years to work for the elimination of these hardships.

We cannot reach a millenium or Utopia in any four years, or eight years, but at least I have felt that people in responsible positions ought to start the ball rolling, that they ought to make an effort, through legislation and through public opinion, in a perfectly normal, sane, sensible way, to provide security -- security for people within themselves so that they would not individually worry --

security for their families, security for their homes and a greater security for their jobs. And, incidentally, a greater security for the people who employ them.

That has been the objective of mine for perhaps twenty-five years and I believe that in these past few years we have taken steps that are going to help the American people toward a greater security within the framework of the American Government.

And so, my friends, that is perhaps a simple expression of a simple philosophy. I think most of you agree with the philosophy at least. Everybody in public office makes mistakes. Every party in power makes mistakes. But, in the last analysis, the problem before the voters of the country, not only tomorrow but next year and the year after that, is whether they want to vote for those people who they believe will, more greatly than the other people, go along towards carrying out that expression of a greater physical and mental and spiritual security for the people of this country.

Tonight at eleven o'clock I am speaking on a nation-wide broadcast -- and again the newspapers have said it is an appeal for votes. It is not. It is an appeal for people in this nation to go to the polls -- not an appeal to vote any ticket. It is an appeal to exercise their right as American citizens.

We have come a long way in 150 years. About a block from where I stand -- up there on the corner of Main Street -- there was a little old stone building and in the year 1788 there was held there the Constitution Convention of the State of New York. My great, great-grandfather was a member of that Convention. The question was, Should New York ratify the Federal Constitution? It was the year before the Federal government was set up and George Washington was inaugurated our first President. At that time the problem before this Convention in Poughkeepsie was whether the State of New York would ratify, in the absence of a Bill of Rights, the Constitution as it was laid down.

And, finally, the delegates from this state, up there in the little old stone building, ratified it only on this condition: "In full faith and confidence that a Bill of Rights would be added to the Constitution after the country was started under the new form of Government." And, largely because of the insistence of the State of New York in demanding a Bill of Rights, almost immediately the new government submitted to the States the first Ten Amendments to the United States Constitution.

And so you will see that not only in my own person but also by inheritance I know something not only about the Constitution of the United States but also about the Bill of Rights.

And in those days, at the time of the first election, after the Constitution was ratified and the government was set up, it is interesting for us to note that very few men -- of course there were no women voting in those days -- comparatively few men voted. The reason for that was that in the early days of the United States the franchise was limited to property holders. Most of this Dutchess County of ours in the early days of the Republic was inhabited by tenant farmers. A tenant farmer could not vote because he was not a freeholder and only freeholders could vote in this and the other counties of the State of New York and the other young states.

Today we have a very different proposition. The franchise is universal. You do not have to be the owner of real estate in order to vote. You do not have to be just a man in order to vote.

The result is that whereas in the early days of the nation, with this limited franchise, the results of an election could not be called the rule of the majority, because so few people voted -- only property holders. Today you have a different situation and by midnight tomorrow night, in all probability, whatever the result is, it will be definitely, clearly, and conclusively the will of the majority.

In the Election of 1932, about forty million voters

in the United States voted. This year there are about fifty-five million Americans who are eligible to vote tomorrow. I want to express the hope that as many as possible of those fifty-five million will go to the polls in order that we may have a clear-cut answer to the problems which will be voted on.

Yes, I go back a good many years in this City. I can remember when, in the Spring, the streets were extremely muddy. I can remember when electric lights first came to Poughkeepsie. And I can remember the first telephone that was put in our house at Hyde Park, much to the horror of most of the family. I can remember when a telegram came the entire household quaked, because telegrams were seldom sent in those days unless someone died. And, taking it by and large, in those 40 or 50 years, I think we have made a good deal of progress, not only in other parts of the country, but right here in this City and County and that is one reason why I am terribly proud of good old Dutchess, whether they vote for me or not.

And so, I am not asking any of you to vote for me, but I am expressing this thought: I hope very much that Dutchess County tomorrow will be found on the same side as the majority of the United States.

Goodnight and good luck.