
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. 1086

1937 October 3

Fort Peck Dam, MT - Address

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT
FORT PECK DAM, MONTANA,
OCTOBER 3, 1937.

Three years have come and gone since I first came

to Fort Peck and saw the beginnings of this, the largest earth dam in the world. Three years have come and gone since we undertook actively in every part of the Nation to reclaim some of the gigantic waste of our natural resources.

During this time we have given useful work to millions of unemployed citizens; we have brought water to dry places, we have increased and cheapened the use of electricity and we have completed thousands of projects of immediate usefulness in every county and every state of the Union.

But most important of all, the Nation as a whole has understood the long-range purposes of our policies.

STATEMENTS FILE
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He hemmed and hawed, admitting thereby that he did not know much about the subject and finally said "You can save half the cost of relief by putting every family that is out of a job or starving on a dole all the year round, and most important of all, you can stop all these silly public works --these Fort Peck, and Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams -- stop flood control, stop irrigation."

When I suggested to him that his program would bring terrific hardship to several million families, he finally blurted out that his real philosophy of life was.

He said "All this business of helping people is ruining the country. Look at my taxes. I have to pay half of all my income in federal and state and local taxes." I happened to know what his income was -- \$400,000 a year -- ~~xxxxxxxx~~ and the poor man thought he was going to the poorhouse because after paying his taxes he only had \$200,000 a year left over.

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But most important of all, the Nation as a whole has understood the long-range purposes of our policies.

It has understood that we are building for future generations of our children and grandchildren, and that in the greater part of what we have done, the money spent is an investment which will come back a thousandfold in the coming years.

A few months ago the owner of a great conservative newspaper insisted to me that the only problem before the Nation was the balancing of the budget. I asked him if he had ever read the budget and he admitted that he had not. I asked him how much he would save, assuming that the coming year we expect to spend six and a half or seven billion dollars. He answered that at least two and a half or three billion dollars of expenditures ought to be eliminated.

Then came my question that always stumps people like him. "Just where would you cut the expenses"?

He hemmed and hawed, admitting thereby that he did not know much about the subject and finally said "You can save half the cost of relief by putting every family that is out of a job or starving on a dole all the year round, and most important of all, you can stop all these silly public works --these Fort Peck, and Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams -- stop flood control, stop irrigation."

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But he capped the climax by adding "Every man in this country who really wants a job or wants to earn a living has no trouble in doing so. There are three million or four million or five million people who are shiftless and worthless, and we might just as well face that fact and get rid of them by letting them starve to death."

I wish I could have brought that man on this trip. I wish he could have seen all that the states and the counties and the cities and the Federal Government are doing to save people and not let them starve. I wish that man could live in eastern Montana or the western Dakotas for a whole year and face facts. His is merely one of many cases of people who sit snugly in their offices and hold forth on the State of the Nation without any conception of the problems of the Nation at firsthand.

SENATOR MURRAY
CONGRESSMAN JIM O'CONNOR
CONGRESSMAN JERRY O'CONNELL

SUB-MARGINAL LAND - WATER CONSERVATION
YELLOWSTONE RIVER -- GALLATIN DAM

MISSOURI WATERSHED

FORT PECK - HYDROELECTRIC POWER

CROP SURPLUS CONTROL - STABILITY OF PRICES
SUPREME COURT

FEDERAL AID TO MUNICIPAL POWER --
SUPREME COURT

FEDERAL REGULATION, MINIMUM WAGES -
MAXIMUM HOURS, CHILD LABOR FOR
GOODS ENTERING INTO STATE
COMMERCE -- SUPREME COURT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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M. H. McIntyre
Secretary to the President.

INFORMAL, EXTEMPOREANOUS REMARKS OF
THE PRESIDENT, FORT PECK, MONTANA,
OCTOBER 3, 1937.

Governor Ayers and, I can almost say, my old friends of Fort Peck, because some of you were here three years ago.

Three years have come and gone and I see a great change. When I was here before there was just the beginning of a dam and now it is about three-quarters finished.

I have been thrilled by it not only because it is four times bigger than any other earth filled dam in the whole world but because of what it is going to do for the people of Montana and the whole Missouri Basin.

It is another illustration of what we have been doing in the past three or four years. During that time we have given useful work to millions of unemployed citizens; we have brought water to dry places, we have increased and cheapened the use of electricity and we have completed literally thousands of projects of immediate usefulness in every county and every state of the Union.

But, most important of all, the Nation as a whole has understood the long-range purpose of our policies. The Nation has understood that we are building for future generations of our children and grandchildren, and that in the greater part of what we have done, the money spent is an investment which will come back a thousandfold in the coming years.

I wish that lots of people could have taken this trip with me out to the Coast and back. I wish in particular that a certain type of citizen could have taken it -- the "doubting Thomases."

Not long ago a very important business man of New York City came to see me to talk about the one thing that lay nearest to his heart, the balancing of the budget. Well, I told him I thought it was pretty important and that we were going to get it balanced next year. Then I asked him if he had ever read the budget. He said "No." I asked him how much he would save in the coming year if he could and he said, "Oh, two or three billions of dollars." And then came my question which always stumps people of his kind. I said, "Just where would you cut expenses?" He hemmed and hawed and he hemmed and hawed some more, and he couldn't tell me where he would save money, although he was saying to the Nation, through the newspaper he owned, that it was perfectly simple to do it.

Well, I pressed him on it and finally he said this: "Why, you could save half the cost of relief by putting every family on to the dole. Every family that is out of a job or starving, put them on a dole the whole year round. Most important of all, you can stop building, right away, these silly public works like Fort Peck and the Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dam. Stop all this flood control business. Stop all this irrigation business."

When I suggested to him that his program would bring terrific hardship on several million families of Americans, he finally told me what his real philosophy of life was. He said, "All this business of helping people is ruining the country. Look at my taxes. I have to pay half of all my income in Federal and state and local taxes."

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And I happened to know what that gentleman's income was -- four hundred thousand dollars a year. And that "poor" man thought that he was going to the poor house because, after paying his taxes, he only had two hundred thousand dollars a year left.

Well, they are not all like him. Most of the ~~influence~~ attacks ~~which~~ being made on American policies comes from people who do not know the United States, ~~it~~ comes from people who have never been out through the great West, comes from people who do not understand the problem, for example, of the drought area. They are people who do not understand the obligation that the government of the locality and of the state and of the Nation has to try to do everything they

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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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Well, they are not all like him. Most of the attacks being made on American policies come from people who do not know the United States, come from people who have never been out through the great West, come from people who do not understand the problem, for example, of the drought area. They are people who do not understand the obligation that the government of the locality and of the state and of the Nation has to try to do everything they possibly can to make possible a decent living for the citizens within their borders.

Yes, they are the kind of people who do not understand when Jim Murray and Jim O'Connor come into my office week after week and make perfect nuisances of themselves and say to me, "Mr. President, we have got to have power developed at the Fort Peck Dam." They are the kind of people that say, "Why, there is all the power in the world up there; why add any more to it?"

They are the kind of people who cannot understand the interest — my interest, Jim Murray's interest, Jim O'Connor's interest, Jerry O'Connell's interest — in the development of the Yellowstone, of the Milk, of the Gallatin, of the Big Horn and of a lot of other rivers right in this State.

One thing I have always specialized in ever since I started collecting postage stamps at the age of ten years is geography, and especially the geography of the United States. I think I realize, as all of you good people do, that we can do many things and we are going to do many things for the preservation of our water out through the dry areas of the country and in taking people off land where they cannot possibly live and give them a chance to farm on good land.

That is the kind of policy your Government should have and must follow. I believe that the people, not only of Montana but of every other state in the Union, are appreciative of the fact that we know where we are going and intend to go there.

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