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. 1087

1937 October 4

Grand Forks, ND - Address re Agriculture
SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT
GRAND FORKS, N. D.
OCTOBER 4, 1937.

I regret that the necessities of the schedule brought me through the greater part of North Dakota by dark. Last night, however, I saw a portion of the drought area of eastern Montana -- a situation which is akin to yours in the western part of this State. We can at least be thankful that the rains and the crops in this valley, and, indeed, in the eastern part of both Dakotas and most of Minnesota have been far more plentiful than last year.

On this intensely interesting trip I have had another view of that northern and western part of the United States which is so greatly dependent for its prosperity on agriculture and its sister -- forestry. I am more than ever convinced of the importance of continuing our national policy of working towards a better economy by stabilizing
and improving the life of the average family.

I received the other day a letter from one of the only two living former members of the Supreme Court of the United States.

I have not asked his permission but I am certain that he will not mind my reading to you three sentences from his letter because they express so beautifully the thoughts of so many of us. He says:

"In this season of grave reflection it gives me greatest comfort and happiness to realize that politically and socially through all my long life, my earnest sympathies have gone out and my earnest efforts have been exercised for the great numbers of my

were

neighbors who living in intolerable conditions while a few of us under discriminating laws of our own making were enjoying much more than a fair share of the bounties of nature and governments."
The confidence that this has been and is unnecessary and socially unwise, and can and should be corrected in large measure by rational and social legislation, is at bottom the reason, my dear Mr. President, why I see eye to eye with you in your effort to accomplish in eight years what should have been in process of accomplishment through the last forty or fifty years.

My conviction is definite that the most difficult charges for our political adversaries' answer at the bar of history will be their opposition to the adoption of civilization's only process for peaceably settling disputes between nations, and their callous indifference and opposition to civilization's other demand that our neighbors be given at least a modest share in the comforts of life."

And he goes on to speak of what we are doing by introducing into our national life and legislation something at least of the influence of the Golden Rule —
the inauguration of a trend toward better things which very certainly can never be halted or turned back. And finally he pays me the finest compliment any man could have in his lifetime. He says "Of course you have fallen into some errors -- that is human, but you have put a new face upon the social and political life of our country."

If ever I get to be eighty years old, like Mr. Justice John H. Clark, I hope that I will have the same spirit that still seeks better things for my neighbors.

In seeking the betterment of our farm population, no matter what part of the country they live in, no matter whether they raise cotton or corn or wheat or beets or potatoes or rice, the experience we have today teaches us that if we would avoid the poverty of the past, we must strive today -- not tomorrow -- toward two objectives.
Any one crop, wheat or cotton or corn, for example, is like any widely used manufactured commodity like bricks or automobiles or shoes. If, for instance, every shoe factory in the United States were to run on a three-shift basis, turning out shoes day and night for two or three years, we would have such a surplus of shoes in the United States that that surplus would have to be sold to the public, in order to get rid of it, at far less than the actual cost of manufacturing the shoes.

The same thing holds good of wheat or cotton or corn. We should remember, incidentally, that the prosperity of the wheat growers helps the prosperity of the cotton growers, because you in the Northwest have more money to buy more articles made out of cotton, and the prosperity of the cotton growers helps the growers of wheat, for the cotton belt is enabled to buy and eat more bread.
If an enormous surplus of wheat piles up in the hands of buyers and speculators, you know from past experience how the price of wheat will drop almost out of sight the following year. Neither you nor I want to repeat the experiences of 1932.

Therefore, I believe that it is essential to our national economy that we have something to say about the control of the major crop surpluses. The Supreme Court has ruled, in a divided opinion, that the Government cannot make a contract with a farmer by which acreage is fixed either downward or upward. I have never subscribed to the constitutional theory that agriculture is a purely local matter and that it has, therefore, no national scope.

Perhaps it will be held constitutional for the Government to say to a farmer "If you do thus and so the Government will do thus and so." As a matter of common sense I cannot see very much practical difference
between the two methods. In the one case the farmer voluntarily enters into a contract; in the other case he voluntarily does something with the knowledge that the Government on its part will do something. 

I feel certain that a majority in both Houses of the Congress will heed the wish of most of the farmers of the Nation in enacting crop surplus control legislation. And it is my thought that legislation toward that end ought to be passed at the earliest possible moment.

Because this legislation was not passed at the last session, it is too late for it to have any bearing on the winter wheat which is now in the ground. Many farmers do fall plowing against next spring's seeding, and in some parts of the Nation crops, such as cotton, are actually planted in late February and early March.
Even after a bill is passed and becomes law on the signature of the President, it takes a month or two before it is humanly possible to set up the machinery in all parts of the country to carry out the provisions of the new law. If, therefore, new legislation is to affect the 1938 crops, haste seems to be important from every angle.

I am happy to come back to North Dakota, and I hope that the coming year will bring you still further along the road to prosperity.
ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Grand Forks, North Dakota

GOVERNOR LANGER, MY FRIENDS OF NORTH DAKOTA AND OF THE NEARBY
STATE OF MINNESOTA AS WELL:

I very much regret that the necessities of the railroad
schedule brought me through the greater part of North Dakota by
dark. Last night, however, I saw a portion of the drought area of
eastern Montana where they have a situation that is akin to your(s)
situation in the western part of this State. We can at least be
thankful (that) for the rains and the crops in this valley and,
indeed, in the eastern part of both Dakotas and most of Minnesota
have been far more plentiful this year than last (year).

And I know something of this valley even though this is
the first time that I have been in Grand Forks in the daytime. I
have known a great deal about it because of a young man who gave me
a great disappointment this morning. I had always thought that
"Jeffy" O'Connor was born in Grand Forks, but he told me that he
didn't get here until he was twelve days old.

He has left North Dakota for a while and is now a citizen
of California although, ever since I have been in Washington he has
been there, doing his part -- and it is a very good one -- in keep-
ing the banks of the United States solvent and your money safe.

I am glad to have had a chance to see your great University,
to see the work that is being done with the assistance given by the
Federal Government toward the erection of buildings -- to see what
I believe is the first mistake of the WPA, this grandstand, it is
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.
only half as big as it ought to be.

On this intensely interesting trip I have had another view of the northern and western part of the United States which is so greatly dependent for its prosperity on agriculture and its sister occupation -- forestry. And I am more than ever convinced of the importance of continuing our national policy of working towards a better economy by stabilizing and improving the life of the average family.

(I received) The other day I got a letter from one of the only two living former members of the Supreme Court of the United States.

I have not asked his permission but I am certain that he will not mind my reading to you three sentences from his letter because they express so beautifully the thoughts (of so many of us) that many of us have. He says in his letter:

"In this season of grave reflection it gives me greatest comfort and happiness to realize that politically and socially through all my long life, my earnest sympathies have gone out and my earnest efforts have been exercised for the great numbers of my neighbors who were living in intolerable conditions while a few of us under discriminating laws of our own making were enjoying much more than a fair share of the bounties of nature and governments. (Applause)

"The confidence that this has been and is unnecessary and socially unwise, and can and should be corrected in large measure by rational and social legislation, is
at bottom the reason, my dear Mr. President, why I see
eye to eye with you in your effort to accomplish in
eight years what should have been in process of accom-
plishment through the last forty or fifty years.
(Applause)

"My conviction is definite that the most diffi-
cult charges for our political adversaries to answer
at the bar of history will be their opposition to the
adoption of civilization's only process for peaceably
settling disputes between nations, and their callous
indifference and opposition to civilization's other
demand that our neighbors be given at least a modest
share in the comforts of life." (Applause)

And he goes on to speak of what we are doing by introducing
into our national life and legislation something at least of the in-
fluence of the Golden Rule -- the inauguration of a trend toward
better things which very certainly can never be halted or turned back.
And finally he pays me the finest compliment that any man could have
in his lifetime. He says,

"Of course you have fallen into some errors --
that is human, but you have put a new face upon the
social and political life of our country." (Applause)

And, my friends, if ever I get to be eighty years old, like
Mr. Justice John H. Clarke, I hope that I will have the same spirit
that at that age still seeks better things for my neighbors. (Applause)

In seeking the betterment of our farm population, no matter
what part of the country they live in, no matter whether they raise
And the same thing goes for wheat. Yes, the principle is the same whether it is shoes or wheat or cotton or corn or hogs.

(The same thing holds good of wheat or cotton or corn.)

We should remember, incidentally, that the prosperity of the wheat growers helps the prosperity of the cotton growers, because you in the Northwest, when wheat is bringing a reasonable and fair price, you have more money to buy more articles made out of cotton, and, in the same way, the prosperity of the cotton growers helps you, the growers of wheat, for the cotton belt, if the price of cotton is reasonable and brings a fair price, is enabled to buy and eat more bread.

And I think we have come to a realization all over the country that if an enormous surplus of (wheat) any one crop, whether it be cotton or wheat or any other thing, piles up in the hands of buyers and speculators, (you know from past experience how the price of wheat will drop almost) the price will drop out of sight the following year. Neither you nor I want to repeat the experiences of 1932.

Therefore, I believe that it is essential to our national economy that we have something to say about the control of (the) major crop surpluses. The Supreme Court has ruled, in a divided opinion, that the Government cannot make a contract with a farmer by which acreage is fixed either (downward or) upward or downward. I, personally, have never subscribed to the constitutional theory that agriculture is a purely local matter and (that it) has (therefore) no national (scope) interest.

Perhaps it will be -- when we pass the new crop bill.
perhaps it will be held constitutional for the Government to say to a farmer, "If you do thus and so, the Government will do thus and so." Now, as a matter of common sense, from your point of view and mine, (I) we cannot see very much practical difference between the two methods. In the one case the farmer voluntarily enters into a contract; in the other case he voluntarily does something with the certain knowledge that, having done it, the Government on its part will do something. One is a contract; the other is a promise. And the result is the same. (Applause)

I feel certain that a majority in both Houses of the Congress will heed the wish of (most) the majority of the farmers of the Nation in enacting crop surplus control legislation. And it is my thought that legislation toward that end ought to be passed at the earliest possible moment.

Because this legislation -- because it was not passed at the last session, it is too late for it to have any bearing on the winter wheat (which) that is now in the ground. Many farmers, in addition to that, do fall plowing against next spring's seeding, and in some parts of the Nation crops, such as cotton, are actually (planted) put in the ground in late February and early March.

And remember another thing, that even after a bill is passed and becomes law on the signature of the President, it takes a month or two before it is humanly possible to set up the machinery in all parts of the country to carry out the provisions of the new law. If, therefore, new legislation is to affect the 1938 crops, haste seems to be important from every angle.

And so, my friends, I come to a great agricultural section
with the message that your interest is exactly the same as every other agricultural section of the Nation, even the same interest as it is in the town of Hyde Park, County of Dutchess, State of New York. (Applause) I am happy to come back to North Dakota, and I hope that the coming year will bring you still further along the road to prosperity. And I am confident that we are going to continue on that road if our purpose is firm, if we go along the road we are going now. (Applause)
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Extemporaneous interpolations by the President
in his address, Grand Forks, No. Dak.,
October 4, 1937.

Governor Langer, my friends of North Dakota
and of the nearby State of Minnesota as well:

I very much regret that the necessities of
the railroad schedule brought me through the
greater part of North Dakota by dark. Last night,
however, I saw a portion of the drought area of
eastern Montana where they have a situation that
is akin to your situation in the western part of
this State. We can at least be thankful for the
rains and the crops in this valley and, indeed,
in the eastern part of both Dakotas and most of
Minnesota they have been far more plentiful this
year than last.

And I know something of this valley even
though this is the first time that I have been in
Grand Forks in the daytime. I have known a
great deal about it because of a young man who
gave me a great disappointment this morning. I
had always thought that "Jefky" O'Connor was born
in Grand Forks, but he told me that he didn't get
here until he was twelve days old.

He has left North Dakota for a while and is
now a citizen of California although, ever since I
have been in Washington he has been there, doing
his part — and it is a very good one — in keeping
the name of the United States solvent and your
money safe.

I am glad to have had a chance to see your
great University, to see the work that is being
done with the assistance given by the Federal
Government toward the erection of buildings — to
see what I believe is the first mistake of the WPA;
this grand stand, it is only half as big as it ought
to be.

On this --- (follow release)
CAUTION: This address of the President, to be made at Grand Forks, North Dakota, October 4, 1937, is to be held for release upon delivery, expected about 11:15 A.M., Central Time.

PLEASE GUARD AGAINST PRIOR RELEASE.

H. A. Moynihan
Secretary to the President.

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On this intensely interesting trip I have had another view of the northern and western part of the United States which is so greatly dependent for its prosperity on agriculture and its sister — forestry. I am more than ever convinced of the importance of continuing our national policy of working towards a better economy by stabilizing and improving the life of the average family.

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I have not asked his permission but I am certain that he will not mind my reading to you three sentences from his letter because they express so beautifully the thoughts of my predecessors. He says:

"In this season of grave reflection it gives me greatest comfort and happiness to realize that politically and socially through all my long life, my earnest sympathies have gone out and my earnest efforts have been exercised for the great number of my neighbors who were living in insalubrious conditions while a few of us under discriminating laws of our own making were enjoying much more than a fair share of the bounties of nature and governments.

"The confidence that this has been and is unnecessary and socially unwise, and can and should be corrected in large measure by rational and social legislation, is at bottom the reason, my dear Mr. President, why I saw eye to eye with you in your effort to accomplish in eight years what should have been in process of accomplishment through the last forty or fifty years.

"My conviction is definite that the most difficult charges for our political adversaries to answer at the bar of history will be our opposition to the adoption of civilization's only process for peacefully settling disputes between nations, and their callous indifference and opposition to civilization's other demand that our neighbors be given at least a modest share in the comforts of life."

And he goes on to speak of what we are doing by introducing into our national life and legislation something at least of the influence of the Golden Rule — the inauguration of a trend toward better things which very certainly can never be halted or turned back. And finally he pays me a little compliment: any man could have in his life time. He says, "Of course you have fallen into some errors — that is human, but you have put a new face upon the social and political life of our country."

If ever I get to be eighty years old, like Mr. Justice John H. Clark, I hope that I will have the same spirit that still seeks better things for my neighbors.
In seeking the betterment of our farm population, no matter what part of the country they live in, no matter whether they raise cotton or corn or wheat or beets or potatoes or rice, the experience we have today teaches us that if we would avoid the poverty of the past, we must strive today — not tomorrow — toward two objectives.

The first is called "better land use" — using the land in such a way that we do not destroy it or harm it for future generations, and in such a way that it will bring to us the best year-in and year-out return as a reward for our labors. This we are doing at least in part today by educating the users of land, by putting back into grass or tree land which should not be under the plow, by bringing water to dry soil which has immense possibilities for profitable use, and by helping farm families to resettle on good land. The money we are spending on these objectives is already coming back as increased national income and will be repaid, in the long run, many times over.

The other objective is the control, with the approval of what I believe is the overwhelming sentiment of the farmers themselves, of what is known as crop surplus.

Any one crop, wheat or cotton or corn, for example, is like any widely used manufactured commodity, like bricks or automobiles or shoes. If, for instance, every shoe factory in the United States were to run on a three-shift basis, turning out shoes day and night for two or three years, we would have such a surplus of shoes in the United States that that surplus would have to be sold to the public, in order to get rid of it, at far less than the actual cost of manufacturing the shoes.

The same thing holds good of wheat or cotton or corn. We should remember, incidentally, that the prosperity of the wheat growers helps the prosperity of the cotton growers, because you in the Northwest have more money to buy more articles made out of cotton, and the prosperity of the cotton growers helps the growers of wheat, for the cotton belt is enabled to buy and eat more bread.

If an enormous surplus of wheat piles up in the hands of buyers and speculators, you know from past experience how the price of wheat will drop almost out of sight the following year. Neither you nor I want to repeat the experiences of 1935.

Therefore, I believe that it is essential to our national economy that we have something to say about the control of major crop surpluses. The Supreme Court has ruled, in a divided opinion, that the Government cannot make a contract with a farmer by which acreage is fixed either downward or upward. I have never subscribed to the constitutional theory that agriculture is a purely local matter and that it has, therefore, no national scope.

Perhaps it will be held constitutional for the Government to say to a farmer, "If you do thus and so, the Government will do thus and so." As a matter of common sense, I cannot see very much practical difference between the two methods. In the one case the farmer voluntarily enters into a contract; in the other case he voluntarily does something with the knowledge that the Government on its part will do something. One is a contract; the other is a promise. The result is the same.

I feel certain that a majority in both Houses of Congress will heed the wish of most of the farmers of the Nation in enacting crop surplus control legislation. And it is my thought that legislation toward that end ought to be passed at the earliest possible moment.
Because the legislation was not passed at the last session, it is too late for it to have any bearing on the winter wheat which is now in the ground. Many farmers do fall plowing against next Spring's seeding, and in some parts of the Nation crops, such as cotton, are actually planted in late February and early March.

Even after a bill is passed and becomes law on the signature of the President, it takes a month or two before it is humanly possible to set up the machinery in all parts of the country to carry out the provisions of the new law. If, therefore, new legislation is to affect the 1938 crop, haste seems to be important from every angle.

I am happy to come back to North Dakota, and I hope that the coming year will bring you still further along the road to prosperity.