
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. 1279

1940 April 20

**Radio Message to Young Democratic Clubs of
America**

*I am speaking before you from the George Washington Temple for the purpose of P.P. first that in this atmosphere one gets a better
inspiration, then* RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT *and a better
one life - A* YOUNG DEMOCRATIC CLUBS OF AMERICA

APRIL 20, 1940
*better sense of proportion about all sorts of things, from
formulate to politics.*

I understand that these meetings of young Democrats in many parts of the country are customarily held close to the birthday anniversary of Thomas Jefferson. While there have been certain debatable exceptions in the past one hundred and fifty years, I can properly say that when our party system began, the party of Thomas Jefferson was without question the liberal party and his opponents, the Federalists, represented conservative thought. In more recent times since the Civil War, it is equally true that when the Democratic Party has been victorious it has represented a more liberal position on public affairs than the Republican Party.

Grover Cleveland, while not perhaps what we would call today a fighting liberal, was certainly more of a liberal than James G. Blaine or Benjamin Harrison. Woodrow Wilson's eight years in office represented a progressive meeting TH of difficult problems of his day, and it is not
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boasting for all of us to suggest that our country has perhaps been fortunate in having met modern problems of extreme seriousness in the liberal spirit -- the do something about it spirit -- during the past seven years.

May I quote to you a few sentences that ~~prove~~^{show} the consistency of the Democratic position during recent years:

On August 24, 1935, speaking to the Young Democratic Clubs of America, I said: "I, for one, am willing to place my trust in the youth of America. If they demand action as well as preachments, I should be ashamed to chill their enthusiasm with the dire prophecy that to change is to destroy. I am unwilling to sneer at the vision of youth But vision does not belong only to the young. There are millions of older people who have vision, just as there are some younger men and women who are ready to put a weary, selfish or greedy hand upon the clock of progress and turn it back The spirit of America is the spirit of inquiry, of readjustment, of improvement, above all a spirit in which youth can find the fulfillment of its ideals".

On January 8, 1936, I said: "Whatever may be the Platform, whoever may be the nominee of the Democratic Party the basic issue will be the retention of popular government -- an issue fraught once more with the difficult problem of disseminating facts and yet more facts, in the face of an opposition bent on hiding and distorting facts". That I might add was before the Presidential election of 1936.

During the whole of the Spring and early Summer of that year you were told that the result of the election was in the lap of the gods; that the Republicans had a chance to win -- that people were tired of liberal government. You remember the Literary Digest and other polls -- and most greatly you remember that only two States out of forty-eight voted to return to "do nothing conservatism".

In 1938, in speaking against the misuse of concentrated power by relatively small minority groups in our country, I said that this Administration was "striving to uphold the integrity of the morals of ^{our} democracy". And that "attacks (by government) on the misuse of concentrated power have been

distorted into attacks onour whole system of private profit and private enterprise". And to illustrate ^{THIS} I pointed ^A out that at that time six hundred million dollars worth of ownership of electric utilities securities held substantial control over thirteen billion dollars worth of all electric utilities securities -- and I said, by way of illustration, "Here is a ninety-six inch dog being wagged by a four inch tail".

This year the nation faces very much the same kind of an electoral campaign as it did in 1932 and 1936. It seems to me very obvious that if the Democratic Party is to defeat the Republican Party next November we must nominate a liberal pair of candidates, running on a liberal and forward-looking Platform.

I am not speaking tonight of world affairs. Your Government is keeping a cool head and a steady hand. We are keeping out of the wars that are going on in Europe and in Asia, but I do not subscribe to the preachment of a Republican aspirant for the Presidency who tells you, in effect, that

the United States and the people of the United States should do nothing to try to bring about a better order, a more secure order, of world peace when the time comes.

It is the domestic scene which I stress tonight. During the next four years there will be new problems to face. We need a national government with enough imagination and enough courage to meet those new problems with concrete, specific remedies -- just as we have met many problems that were new during the past seven years with imagination and courage and practical idealism. I do not say that the machinery that we have used or are using is perfect or that it cannot be improved -- but you need practical idealism to make the present machinery function better.

On the other side, the pre-Convention campaign, up-to-date, has resolved itself roughly into three parts, none of which appeals greatly to my intelligence.

First, our opponents are seeking to frighten the country -- by telling people that the present Administration is deliberately trying to put this nation into war or that it is inevitably drifting into war. You know better than that.

Second, they are telling you that many of the measures of the past seven years are good but that they would carry them out with greater efficiency if they were in power. I do not think that we can swallow that assertion because, quite aside from millions of fine citizens who normally vote the Republican ticket year in and year out, we and they must acknowledge that practically every serious government scandal since the Civil War has occurred under a Republican Administration, and that the underlying Republican leadership -- the groups and cliques which have always owned the Republican Party are still just as much in the saddle of ownership as they were in the old days.

Finally, they tell you that they will perform an amazing miracle -- that they will give everybody jobs -- that they will maintain relief -- that they will give work to the unemployed -- that they will meet the needs of the national defense -- that they will reduce your taxes -- and that with all, the total of the expenditures of the Federal Government will go down so much that they will have a surplus in the Treasury. And you and I know, from long experience, when we ask ~~them~~ how are you going to do it, ~~that their~~ only answer is the vague assertion that they will repeal all of the horrid and nerve-racking restrictions on private business and let private business do the rest.

In other words, all that the country is being promised to date is a return of the old days of '29 when America went speculation mad, when half the families of the land were sucked in to an orgy of over-production, of stock gambling, while at the very moment of it unemployment was increasing, farm prices were decreasing and we were riding for the worst social and economic fall the country had ever known.

Speaking as an American, I am sorry that a campaign, which should be pitched on a level of intelligent argument, has fallen into such low estate as early as this. Speaking as a partisan, I rejoice because I am confident that the average voter in the United States is already somewhat tired of the "view-with-alarm" outcries of the Republican candidates.

I do not think that the campaign of Democrats should be pitched on the old level of just pointing with pride. During these seven years I think that we have accomplished much but that a great deal remains to be done by way of accomplishments in relation to existing problems, and that the next Administration will have to devise ways and means, in a liberal and progressive spirit, to meet difficulties which we are only just beginning to appreciate and to analyze.

I say to you, therefore, that the young people of the United States -- young Democrats and all the others -- have another magnificent opportunity to support a government of proven liberal action rather than to switch over and take a

long chance with a Party historically founded on conservatism,
no matter what the glitter of their studied generatities
trumpeted forth in an election year.

Young people, and ^{all of us} ~~the people~~ for that matter, know
what fly paper looks like. ^{stick} ~~when they see it.~~ ^{We} They will keep ^{be most careful}
^{to} ~~their~~ feet and ^{aim} ~~their~~ heads away from the fly paper because ^{all the evening someone}
^{is} ~~they~~ are possessed of good old-fashioned average American ^{r. fall}
common sense.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

(Big. Working copy)

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Broadcast from Georgia Hall, Georgia Warm Springs Foundation
Over a Nation-wide hookup
To the Young Democratic Clubs of America
April 20, 1940, 9:45 P. M., C. S. T.

MY FRIENDS OF THE YOUNG DEMOCRATIC CLUBS:

I am speaking to you from Georgia Warm Springs Foundation for the victims of infantile paralysis, and I always feel that in this atmosphere one gets a better perspective of life, a better sense of proportion about all sorts of things, all kinds of things, from peanuts to politics.

I understand that these meetings of young Democrats in many parts of the country are customarily held close to the birthday anniversary of Thomas Jefferson. While there have been certain debatable exceptions in the past (one) hundred and fifty years, I can properly say that when our party system began the party of Thomas Jefferson was without question the liberal party and his opponents, the Federalists, represented conservative thought. In more recent times since the Civil War, for example, it is equally true that when the Democratic Party has been victorious it has represented a more liberal position on public affairs than the Republican Party.

Grover Cleveland, while not perhaps what we would call today a fighting, left-wing liberal, was certainly more of a liberal than James G. Blaine or Benjamin Harrison. Woodrow Wilson's eight years in office represented a progressive meeting of the difficult problems of his day, and it is not boasting for all of us to suggest that our country has perhaps

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 or phrases extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

I am speaking to you from George Washington Hall, George Washington Foundation for the Victims of Infantile Paralysis, and I always feel that in this atmosphere one gets a better perspective of life, a better sense of proportion about all sorts of things, all kinds of things, from pennies to politics.

I understand that these meetings of young Democrats in many parts of the country are customarily held close to the birthday anniversary of Thomas Jefferson. While there have been certain debatable exceptions in the past (one) hundred and fifty years, I can properly say that when our party began the party of Thomas Jefferson was without question the liberal party and his opponents, the Federalists, represented conservative thought. In more recent times since the Civil War, for example, it is equally true that when the Democratic Party has been victorious it has represented a more liberal position on public affairs than the Republican Party.

Grover Cleveland, while not perhaps what we would call today a lightning bolt liberal, was certainly more of a liberal than James G. Blaine or Benjamin Harrison. Woodrow Wilson's eight years in office represented a progressive meeting of the difficult problems of his day, and it is not possible for all of us to suggest that our country has perhaps

been fortunate in having met modern problems of extreme seriousness in the liberal spirit -- the do something about it spirit -- during the past seven years.

May I quote to you a few sentences that (prove) show the consistency of the Democratic position during recent years:

On August 24, 1935, speaking to the Young Democratic Clubs of America, I said: "I, for one, am willing to place my trust in the youth of America. If they demand action as well as preachments, I should be ashamed to chill their enthusiasm with the dire prophecy that to change is to destroy. I am unwilling to sneer at the vision of youth But vision does not belong only to the young. There are millions of older people who have vision, just as there are some younger men and women who are ready to put a weary, selfish or greedy hand upon the clock of progress and turn it back The spirit of America is the spirit of inquiry, of readjustment, of improvement, above all a spirit in which youth can find the fulfillment of its ideals."

And on January 8, 1936, I said: "Whatever may be the Platform, whoever may be the nominee of the Democratic Party the basic issue will be the retention of popular government -- an issue fraught once more with the difficult problem of disseminating facts and yet more facts, in the face of an opposition bent on hiding and distorting facts." That I might add was shortly before the Presidential election of 1936.

During the whole of the Spring and early Summer of that year you were told by many people that the result of the election was in the lap of the gods; that the Republicans had a chance to win -- that people were tired, tired of liberal government. And you remember the Literary Digest and other polls -- (and) but most greatly you remember that only two States that November, two states out of forty-eight voted to return to "do nothing conservatism."

In 1938, in speaking against the misuse of concentrated power by relatively small minority groups in our country, I said that this Administration was "striving to uphold the integrity of the morale of our democracy". And that "attacks (by government) on the misuse of concentrated power have been distorted into attacks on our whole system of private profit and private enterprise." And to illustrate this I pointed out that at that time six hundred million dollars worth of ownership of electric utilities securities held substantial control over thirteen billion dollars worth of all electric utilities securities -- and I said, by way of illustration, "Here is a ninety-six inch dog being wagged by a four inch tail."

This year the nation faces very much the same kind of an electoral campaign as it did in 1932 and in 1936. It seems to me very obvious that if the Democratic Party is to defeat the Republican Party next November we must nominate a liberal pair of candidates, running on a liberal and forward-looking Platform.

I am not speaking tonight of world affairs. Your Government is keeping a cool head and a steady hand. We are keeping out of the wars that are going on in Europe and in Asia, but I do not subscribe to the preachment of a Republican aspirant for the Presidency who tells you, in effect, that the United States and the people of the United States should do nothing to try to bring about a better order, a more secure order, of world peace when the time comes to try.

It is the domestic scene which I stress tonight. During the next four years there will be new problems to face. We need a national government with enough imagination and enough courage to meet those new problems with concrete, specific remedies -- just as we have met many problems that were new during the past seven years with imagination and courage and practical idealism. I do not say that the machinery that we have used or are using is perfect or that it cannot be improved -- but you need practical idealism to make the present machinery function better.

On the other side of the fence, the pre-Convention campaign, up-to-date, has resolved itself roughly into three parts, none of which appeals very greatly to my intelligence.

First, our opponents are seeking to frighten the country -- by telling people that the present Administration is deliberately trying to put this nation into war or that it is inevitably drifting into war. You know better than that and so do I.

Secondly, they are telling you that many of the measures of the past seven years are good but that they would carry them out with greater efficiency if they were in power. I do not think that we can swallow that assertion because, quite aside from millions of fine citizens who normally vote the Republican ticket year in and year out, we and they must acknowledge that practically every serious government scandal since the Civil War has occurred under a Republican Administration, and, furthermore, that the underlying Republican leadership -- the groups and cliques which have always owned the Republican party are still just as much in the saddle of that ownership as they were in the old days.

And finally, they tell you that they will perform an amazing miracle -- that they will give everybody jobs -- that they will maintain relief -- that they will give work to the unemployed -- that they will meet the needs of the national defense -- that they will reduce your taxes -- that they will do all kinds of unknown things for the farmers -- and that with it all, the total of the expenditures of the Federal Government will go down so much that they will have a surplus in the Treasury. And you and I know, from long experience, when we ask (them) how are you going to do it, (that) their only answer is the vague assertion that they will repeal all the horrid and nerve-racking restrictions on private business and let private business do all the rest.

In other words, all that the country is being promised

to date is a return of the old days of 1929 when America went speculation mad, when half the families of the land were sucked in to any orgy of over-production, of stock gambling, while at the very moment of it unemployment was increasing, farm prices were decreasing and we were riding for the worst social and economic fall the country had ever known.

Speaking as an American, I am sorry that a campaign, which should be pitched on a level of intelligent argument, has fallen into such low estate as early as this. Speaking as a partisan, I rejoice because I am confident that the average voter in the United States is already somewhat tired of the "view-with-alarm" outcries of the Republican candidates.

I do not think that the campaign of Democrats should be pitched on the old level of just pointing with pride. During these seven years I think that we have accomplished much but that a great deal remains to be done by way of accomplishments in relation to existing problems, and that the next Administration will have to devise ways and means, in a liberal and progressive spirit, to meet difficulties which we are only just beginning to appreciate and to analyze.

I say to you, therefore, that the young people of the United States -- young Democrats and all the others -- have another magnificent opportunity to support a government of proven liberal action rather than to switch over and take a long chance with a Party historically founded on conservatism no matter what the glitter of their studied generalities trumpeted forth in an election year.

Young people, and all of us for that matter, know what sticky fly paper looks like. We will be most careful to keep our feet and our heads away from the fly paper, all this coming Summer and Fall, because we are possessed of good old-fashioned average American common sense.

STATEMENTS FILE

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RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Broadcast from Georgia Hall, Warm Springs, Georgia
over a Nation-wide hookup
to the Young Democratic Clubs of America
April 20, 1940, 9.45 P.M., C.S.T.

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for the victims of infantile paralysis, and I always feel that in
this atmosphere one ~~may~~ gets a better perspective of life, a better
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(Copy speech, with omissions and interpolations.)

HOLD FOR RELEASEHOLD FOR RELEASEHOLD FOR RELEASE

The following address of the President to be broadcast from Warm Springs, Georgia, over a nation-wide hook-up to the Young Democratic Clubs of America, is for release at 9:45 P. M., Central Standard Time, April 20, 1940.

PLEASE SAFEGUARD AGAINST PREMATURE RELEASE.

William D. Hassett.

I understand that these meetings of young Democrats in many parts of the country are customarily held close to the birthday anniversary of Thomas Jefferson. While there have been certain debatable exceptions in the past (one) hundred and fifty years, I can properly say that when our party system began the party of Thomas Jefferson was without question the liberal party and his opponents, the Federalists, represented conservative thought. In more recent times since the Civil War, it is equally true that when the Democratic Party has been victorious it has represented a more liberal position on public affairs than the Republican Party.

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Young people, and all of us for that matter, know what sticky fly paper looks like. We will be most careful to keep our feet and our heads away from the fly paper, all this coming Summer and Fall, because we are possessed of good old-fashioned average American common sense.

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