

January 24, 1941

[Volunteer Participation Committee]

FDR Speech File

1376

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INFORMAL REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO MEMBERS OF
THE VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
JULY 24, 1941 -- 11.05 A.M., E.S.T.

THE PRESIDENT: (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to be the -- what do they call it -- the Chamberlain, and do the introducing?

MAYOR LA GUARDIA: Yes.

(the President shakes hands with all Members)

THE PRESIDENT: (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to say something?

MAYOR LA GUARDIA: No.

THE PRESIDENT: I think that's a good introduction of all of you. You have got an awful lot of work to do on these things. I haven't got any prepared speech, but I do feel very strongly that we must bring home certain things to every part of the country, and it has got to be done through civilian work. It has got to be done among civilians. Other things are pretty well organized -- production -- and the training program, but what we need is to get into the homes and families and make people realize certain facts.

The Mayor's work is really in two parts. The first is what I call quasi-military -- a thing like preparing sandbags; and they may be necessary in certain parts of the country, not necessarily all over. Air-raid alarms, and so forth and so on. That is only part of it that can be done very largely through the constituted authorities in the State governments, City and County governments, but beyond that it is your work, which is at least equally important -- more important.

People still in this country haven't got enough idea -- I was going to say the vaguest idea -- they have -- they are getting it -- but

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. Underline and all other markings may -- it also indicates

they haven't got enough idea of what modern war means, unfortunately. And it isn't anybody's fault over here that modern war means something entirely different from what it used to be. It is a war between populations, and not between armies. That, I think, is something that the average home in this country has not yet got sufficiently through their heads.

We know what is happening in England today. We know the fact that the women in London -- mothers of families -- are just as important in the defense of Britain as one of the men on a destroyer, or some girl who is working in a munitions factory. They are all part of this population defense. And I think that we have a long, long ways to go in this country. We are going to get, through you, an organization in every community. We can't do it all from Washington. The responsibility, I think is yours by units -- the --. We took a unit -- that is a corps area -- and I am going to hold you responsible in these corps areas for what goes on, and I am not going to be put off by people who say, "Well, we couldn't find out about this from Washington." Or, "We don't know who has the jurisdiction." I don't care who has the jurisdiction. You have. In other words, if you have some problem of organization as to whose responsibility it is, and you can't find out whether it is being handled by this, that or the other agency within a State, or a corps area, or a community, I am not going to take that as an excuse. Go ahead and do the thing that you want to do, first; and talk about jurisdiction afterwards. (laughter) Good advice? (laughter)

And so I am looking for real results. Now, you may have some question about your relationship to State Councils of Defense, and local Councils of Defense. I am looking for results. I think they will work with you in almost every part of the country. I don't think you are going

to have any real trouble, any more than you are going to have sporadic cases of what might be called political trouble.

I don't know, but I have an idea that there are just about as many Republicans in this group as there are Democrats. I frankly -- I don't care, except for the fact that this has been a sufficiently good illustration that this is non-political. You have labor here. You have capital. You have negroes here. You have white people. You have got every cross-section of American life to represent it on this Committee.

And the question of politics. Somebody may start it. Don't bring it to me. You are Americans, and you don't belong to any party in this work.

And so I don't know that there is anything else I want to say, except that, quite frankly, I am looking for results from all of you. We will do the best we can. It is going to take a little while to get all the machinery working smoothly. You may have to change from one type of lubricating oil to another type of lubricating oil, but I am inclined to think that you don't want to make molehills -- mountains out of molehills.

What we want is to get this thing into every family in the United States. And, incidentally, there are a great many people who don't even belong to families, who are off by themselves -- individuals. We want you to go after those people and explain the real necessity and seriousness of this world situation.

Let me just give you an example which I got -- to use what they call 'off the record'. Some of these things you do -- well, anybody can work it out for themselves -- is to tell the people some things that they don't quite understand. There are lots of things that people don't quite

understand. You are an information bureau to all of them. And I will give you the example.

Here on the East Coast, you have been reading that the Secretary of the Interior is -- as Oil Administrator -- is faced with the problem of not enough gasoline to go around in the East Coast, and how he is asking everybody to curtail their consumption of gasoline. All right. Now, I am -- I might be called an American citizen, living in Hyde Park, N.Y. And I say, "That's a funny thing. Why am I asked to curtail my consumption of gasoline when I read in the papers that thousands of tons of gasoline are going out from Los Angeles -- West Coast -- to Japan; and we are helping Japan in what looks like an act of aggression?"

All right. Now the answer is a very simple one. There is a world war going on, and has been for some time -- nearly two years. One of our efforts, from the very beginning, was to prevent the spread of that world war in certain areas where it didn't -- it hadn't started. One of those areas is a place called the Pacific Ocean -- one of the largest areas of the earth. There happened to be a place in the South Pacific where we had to get a lot of things out of there -- rubber -- tin -- and so forth and so on, from down in the Dutch Indies, the Strait Settlements, and Indo-China. And we had to help get the Australian surplus of meat and wheat, and corn, for England.

And it was very essential, from our own selfish point of view of defense, to prevent a war from starting in the South Pacific. So our foreign policy was -- trying to stop a war from breaking out down there. At the same time, from the point of view of even France at that time -- of course France still had her head above water -- we wanted to keep that line of supplies from Australia to New Zealand going to the Near East -- all their

troops, all their supplies that they have maintained in Syria, North Africa and Palestine. So it was essential for Great Britain that we try to keep the peace down there.

All right. And now here is a nation called Japan. Whether they had at that time aggressive prospects to enlarge their empire south, they didn't have any oil of their own up in the north. Now, if we cut the oil off, they would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had war.

Therefore, there was -- you might call -- a method in our madness in letting this oil go to Japan, with the hope -- and it has worked for two years -- of keeping war out of the South Pacific, for our own good, for the good of the defense of Great Britain, and the Freedom of the Seas. Now it's just an illustration.

Now you people can help to make the average citizen who wouldn't hear of that, or doesn't read the papers carefully, or listen to the radio carefully -- get them to understand what some of these apparent anomalies mean. So, on the information end, I think you have got just as great a task as you have on the actual organization.

Now on this organization -- to come back to that for a minute -- it is perfectly amazing the number of letters which I get here in the White House -- and my wife in the White House -- from people -- men and women in every -- literally every County in the United States -- who are pleading to be told what they can do. They really honestly are -- they are ready to work.

And so my message to you is -- to act as starters of this "horse race".

MAYOR LA GUARDIA: Thank you, Mr. President. We will carry on.

THE PRESIDENT: Good luck to you. I wish I could sit in with you.

STATEMENTS FILE

FOR THE PRESS

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 24, 1941.

INFORMAL RELAXES OF THE PRESIDENT
TO MEMBERS OF THE
VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

You have a lot of work to do. I haven't prepared any speech, but I do feel very strongly that we must bring home certain things to every part of the country, and that it has got to be done through civilian work. It has got to be done by civilians among civilians. Other things are pretty well organized -- production -- and the training program, but what we need is to get the people as a whole to realize certain facts.

The Mayor's work is really in two parts. The first is what I call quasi-military -- a thing like preparing sandbags; and they may be necessary in certain parts of the country, not necessarily all over. Air-raid alarms, and so forth and so on. That is only part of it that can be done largely through the constituted authorities in the State governments, City and County governments, but beyond that it is your work, which is at least equally important -- more important.

People in this country unfortunately haven't got enough idea of what modern war means. And it isn't anybody's fault over here that modern war means something entirely different from what it used to be. It is a war between populations, and not alone between armies. That, I think, is something that those in the average home in this country have not yet got through their heads.

We know what is happening in England today. We know the fact that women in London -- mothers of families -- are just as important in the defense of Britain as men on a destroyer. They are all part of this defense. And I think that we have a long, long ways to go in this country.

We are going to get through you an organization in every community. We can't do it all from Washington. The responsibility, I think, is yours by units -- by corps areas. I am going to hold you responsible in these corps areas for what goes on, and I am not going to be put off by people who say, "Well, we couldn't find out about this from Washington." Or, "We don't know who has the jurisdiction." I don't care who has the ultimate jurisdiction. You have. In other words, if you have some problem of organization and you can't find out whether it is being handled by this, that or the other agency within a State, or a corps area, or a community, I am not going to take that as an excuse. Go ahead and do the thing that you want to do, first; and talk about jurisdiction afterwards.

I am looking for real results. You may have some question about your relationship to State Councils of Defense, and local Councils of Defense. I am looking for results. I think they will work with you in almost every part of the country. I don't think you are going to have any real trouble, any more than you are going to have sporadic cases of what might be called political trouble.

I don't know, but I have an idea that there are just about as many Republicans in this group as there are Democrats. Frankly -- I don't care, except for the fact that this has been a good illustration that this work is non-political. You have labor here. You have capital. You have negroes here. You have white people. You have got every cross-section of American life represented on this Committee.

About this question of politics. Somebody may start it. Don't bring it to me. You are Americans. You don't belong to my party in this work.

I don't know that there is anything else I want to say, except that, quite frankly, I am looking for results from all of you. We will do the best we can. It is going to take a little while to get all the machinery working smoothly. I am inclined to think that you don't want to make mountains out of molehills.

What we want is to get this thing into every family in the United States. And, incidentally, there are a great many people who don't even belong to families, who are off by themselves -- individuals. We want you to go after those people and explain the real necessity, and seriousness of this world situation.

There are lots of things that people don't quite understand. You are an information bureau to all of them. And I will give you the example.

Here on the East Coast, you have been reading that the Secretary of the Interior, as Oil Administrator, is faced with the problem of not enough gasoline to go around in the East Coast, and how he is asking everybody to curtail their consumption of gasoline. All right. Now, I am -- I might be called an American citizen, living in Hyde Park, N. Y. And I say, "That's a funny thing. Why am I asked to curtail my consumption of gasoline when I read in the papers that thousands of tons of gasoline are going out from Los Angeles -- West Coast -- to Japan; and we are helping Japan in what looks like an act of aggression?"

All right. Now the answer is a very simple one. There is a world war going on, and has been for some time -- nearly two years. One of our efforts, from the very beginning, was to prevent the spread of that world war in certain areas where it hadn't started. One of those areas is a place called the Pacific Ocean -- one of the largest areas of the earth. There happened to be a place in the South Pacific where we had to get a lot of things -- rubber -- tin -- and so forth and so on -- down in the Dutch Indies, the Strait Settlements, and Indo-China. And we had to help get the Australian surplus of meat and wheat, and corn, for England.

It was very essential from our own selfish point of view of defense to prevent a war from starting in the South Pacific. So our foreign policy was -- trying to stop a war from breaking out down there. At the same time, from the point of view of even France at that time -- of course France still had her head above water -- we wanted to keep that line of supplies from Australia and New Zealand going to the Near East -- all their troops, all their supplies that they have maintained in Syria, North Africa and Palestine. So it was essential for Great Britain that we try to keep the peace down there in the South Pacific.

All right. And now here is a nation called Japan. Whether they had at that time aggressive purposes to enlarge their empire southward, they didn't have any oil of their own up in the north. Now, if we cut the oil off, they probably would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had war.

Therefore, there was -- you might call -- a method in letting this oil go to Japan, with the hope -- and it has worked for two years -- of keeping war out of the South Pacific for our own good, for the good of the defense of Great Britain, and the freedom of the seas.

You people can help to enlighten the average citizen who wouldn't hear of that, or doesn't read the papers carefully, or listen to the radio carefully -- to understand what some of these apparent anomalies mean. So, on the information end, I think you have got just as great a task as you have in the actual organization work.

Now on this organization -- to come back to that for a minute -- it is amazing the number of letters I get here in the White House -- and my wife in the White House -- from men and women in literally every County in the United States -- who are pleading to be told what they can do to help. They honestly are ready to work.

So my message to you is: Act as starters of this "horse race".

ATTACHMENT FILE

INFORMAL REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO
MEMBERS OF THE VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
JULY 24, 1941 -- 11:05 A.M., E.S.T.
IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

THE PRESIDENT: (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to be the -- what do they call it -- the Chamberlain, and do the introducing?

MAYOR LAGUARDIA: Yes.

(The President shakes hands with all Members)

THE PRESIDENT: (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to say something?

MAYOR LAGUARDIA: No.

THE PRESIDENT: I think that's a good introduction of all of you. You have got an awful lot of work to do on these things. I haven't got any prepared speech, but I do feel very strongly that we must bring home certain things to every part of the country, and it has got to be done through civilian work. It has got to be done among civilians. Other things are pretty well organized -- production -- and the training program, but what we need is to get into the homes and families and make people realize certain facts.

The Mayor's work is really in two parts. The first is what I call quasi-military -- a thing like preparing sandbags; and they may be necessary in certain parts of the country, not necessarily all over. Air-raid alarms, and so forth and so on. That is only part of it that can be done very largely through the constituted authorities in the State governments, City and County governments, but beyond that it is your work, which is at least equally important -- more important.

People still in this country haven't got enough idea -- I was going to say the vaguest idea -- they have -- they are getting it -- but / they haven't got enough idea of what modern war means, unfortunately. And

it isn't anybody's fault over here that modern war means something entirely different from what it used to be. It is a war between populations, and not between armies. That, I think, is something that the average home in this country has not yet got sufficiently through their heads.

We know what is happening in England today. We know the fact that the women in London -- mothers of families -- are just as important in the defense of Britain as one of the men on a destroyer, or some girl who is working in a munitions factory. They are all part of this population defense. And I think that we have a long, long ways to go in this country. We are going to get, through you, an organization in every community. We can't do it all from Washington. The responsibility, I think is yours by ~~X~~ units -- the --. We took a unit -- ~~#~~, that is a corps area -- and I am going to hold you responsible in these corps areas for what goes on, and I am not going to be put off by people who say, "Well, we couldn't find out about this from Washington." Or, "We don't know who has the jurisdiction." I don't care who has the jurisdiction. You have. In other words, if you have some problem of organization as to whose responsibility it is, and you can't find out whether it is being handled by this, that or the other agency within a State, or a corps area, or a community, I am not going to take that as an excuse. Go ahead and do the thing that you want to do, first; and talk about jurisdiction afterwards. (laughter) Good advice? (laughter)

And so I am looking for real results. Now, you may have some question about your relationship to State ~~X~~ Councils of Defense, and local Councils of Defense. I am looking for results. I think they will work with you in almost every part of the country. I don't think you are going to have any real trouble, any more than you are going to have sporadic cases of what might be called political trouble.

I don't know, but I have an idea that there are just about as many Republicans in this group as there are Democrats. I frankly -- I don't care, except for the fact that this has been a sufficiently good illustration that this is non-political. You have labor here. You have capital. You have negroes here. You have white people. You have got every cross-section of American life to represent it on this Committee.

And the question of politics. Somebody may start it. Don't bring it to me. You are Americans, and you don't belong to any party in this work.

And so I don't know that there is anything else I want to say, except that, quite frankly, I am looking for results from all of you. We will do the best we can. It is going to take a little while to get all the machinery working smoothly. You may have to change from one type of lubricating oil to another type of lubricating oil, but I am inclined to think that you don't want to make molehills -- mountains out of molehills.

What we want is to get this thing into every family in the United States. And, incidentally, there are a great many people who don't even belong to families, who are off by themselves -- individuals. We want you to go after those people and explain the real necessity~~X~~ and seriousness of this world situation.

Let me just give you an example which I got -- to use what they call 'off the record'. Some of these things you do -- well, anybody can work it out for themselves -- is to tell the people some things that they don't quite understand. There are lots of things that people don't quite understand. You are an information bureau to all of them. And I will give you the example.

Here on the East Coast, you have been reading that the Secretary of the Interior is as Oil Administrator is faced with the problem of not enough gasoline to go around in the East Coast, and how he is asking everybody to curtail their consumption of gasoline. All right. Now, I am -- I might be called an American citizen, living in Hyde Park, N. Y. And I say, "That's a funny thing. Why am I asked to curtail my consumption of gasoline when I read in the papers that thousands of tons of gasoline are going out from Los Angeles -- West Coast -- to Japan; and we are helping Japan in what looks like an act of aggression?"

All right. Now the answer is a very simple one. There is a world war going on, and has been for some time -- nearly two years. One of our efforts, from the very beginning, was to prevent the spread of that world war in certain areas where it didn't -- it hadn't started. One of those areas is a place called the Pacific Ocean -- one of the largest areas of the earth. There happened to be a place in the South Pacific where we had to get a lot of things out of there -- rubber -- tin -- and so forth and so on, from down in the Dutch Indies, the Strait Settlements, and Indo-China. And we had to help get the Australian surplus of meat and wheat, and corn, for England.

And it was very essential, from our own selfish point of view of defense, to prevent a war from starting in the South Pacific. So our foreign policy was -- trying to stop a war from breaking out down there. At the same time, from the point of view of even France at that time -- of course France still had her head above water -- we wanted to keep that line of supplies from Australia to New Zealand going to the Near East, all their troops, all their supplies that they have maintained in Syria, North Africa and Palestine. So it was essential for Great Britain that we try to keep

the peace down there.

All right. And now here is a nation called Japan. Whether they had at that time aggressive prospects to enlarge their empire south, they didn't have any oil of their own up in the north. Now, if we cut the oil off, they would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had war.

Therefore, there was -- you might call -- a method in our madness in letting this oil go to Japan, with the hope -- and it has worked for two years -- of keeping war out of the South Pacific, ^{for} our own good, for the good of the defense of Great Britain, and the Freedom of the Seas. Now it's just an illustration.

Now you people can help to make the average citizen who wouldn't hear of that, or doesn't read the papers carefully, or listen to the radio carefully -- get them to understand what some of these apparent anomalies mean. So, on the information end, I think you have got just as great a task as you have on the actual organization.

Now on this organization -- to come back to that for a minute -- it is perfectly amazing the number of letters which I get here in the White House -- and my wife in the White House -- from people -- men and women in every -- literally every County in the United States -- who are pleading to be told what they can do. They really honestly are -- they are ready to work.

And so my message to you is -- to act as starters of this horse race.[#]

MAYOR LAGUARDIA: Thank you, Mr. President. We will carry on.

THE PRESIDENT: Good luck to you. I wish I could sit in with you.

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On the Press

July 24, 1941.
Immuno Radio Release

Informal

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

TO

MEMBERS OF THE VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE
JULY 24, 1941 - 11:05 A.M., Room 700
IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT.

~~THE PRESIDENT:~~ (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to be the -- what do they call it -- the Chamberlain, and do the introducing?

~~MAJOR LAUGARDIA:~~ Yes.

(The President shakes hands with all Members.)

~~THE PRESIDENT:~~ (To Mayor LaGuardia) Are you going to say something?

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~~THE PRESIDENT:~~ I think that's a good introduction of all of you. You have got a awful lot of work to do, ^{my} ~~on these~~ things. I haven't got any prepared speech, but I do feel very strongly that we must bring home certain things to every part of the country, and it has got to be done through civilian work. It has got to be done among civilians. Other things are pretty well organized -- production -- and the training program, but what we need is to get ^{the} ~~home~~ ^{as a whole} people realize certain facts.

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the peace down there in the South Pacific

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Therefore, there was -- you might call -- a method in ~~our~~ ^{our} ~~method~~ ⁱⁿ letting this oil go to Japan, with the hope -- and it has worked for two years -- of keeping war out of the South Pacific ~~for our own good, for the good of the defense of Great Britain, and the freedom of the seas.~~ ~~now~~ ^{is} ~~an~~ ^{just an} illustration.

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Now on this organization -- to come back to that for a minute -- it is perfectly amazing the number of letters ~~which~~ I get here in the White House -- and my wife in the White House -- from ~~people~~ men and women in ~~every~~ literally every County in the United States -- who are pleading to be told what they can do. They really honestly are ~~they're~~ ready to work.

And so my message to you is "act as starters of this horse race."

MARSHAL LAGUARDIA: Thank you, Mr. President. We will carry on.

THE PRESIDENT: Good luck to you. I wish I could sit in with you.

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