

April 18, 1936

[Hydion Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

The President's reading copy was given to Felix Frankfurter who lost it. This is the original carbon of that original copy.

#1585

PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AT THE GRIDIRON DINNER

WILLARD HOTEL - SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 1936

The spring dinners of the Gridiron Club always provide unusual pleasure both for the spectators and for the subjects. It is a spring occasion -- wit renewed from the old sap blossoms forth anew. A vernal spirit is in the air. Most of you look positively vernal, though I cannot say that many of you are verdant.

The thoughts of all of us are thus directed toward the summer of promise that lies ahead -- many promises. I will not inject a sour note by suggesting to some who are here that autumn, with its falling leaves, will follow, and that winter with its heavy frosts is equally inevitable.

Glancing around these tables, and with the aid of high-powered glasses, I see a number of gentlemen, and I also miss a number of gentlemen, who, as a group, can be

classified, not necessarily under the generic name of Republicans, but rather under the classification of "agin the governmentors." Not satisfied to let well enough alone, or perhaps I should say better enough, these gentlemen aspire to become President of the United States. I admire these qualities of ambition and of self-sacrifice.

One of them is a publisher who has translated himself slowly westward from city to city until he has perched in the windiest of our great mid-western cities. One of them, from Ohio, has perhaps the thought that if there have been two Adamsses and two Harrisons and two Roosevelts, there might very well be two Tafts. And as a good friend of his distinguished Father, I do not think it would be a bad idea at all -- some

Another is a western Governor, who like all his neighbor governors has had a bad day. Another, now a resident of the Capitol, presided over

the destinies of a newspaper in a city famous for its imitations

of Queen Anne and Louis ^{Quatorze} ~~X~~ furniture ^{My goodness, Arthur, royal} & what a ~~royal~~ background, you have.

Another Senator, not with us, however, is that Demosthenes from the Rookies, our greatest protagonist of peace, except when it

his subject as called for in their State Constitutions.

comes to peace within his own party. And still another, not present, is a citizen of California, who, from past experience in Washington, should know better.

And in order to be fair about it, your attention is also invited to your speaker - whom I leave to you to characterize according to your own ideas on the subject.

I have no doubt that we are an interesting group because I take it that we are all candidates at least for a nomination.

But I have one great advantage that none of the other gentlemen present or not present, except one, possesses. I have learned lessons -- invaluable lessons -- and I do not think it would be fair to hold that knowledge secret. The day would be incomplete if I did not, as usual, break some time-honored precedent. I am going, therefore, to initiate these other candidates in some of the requirements of a successful campaign -- to tell them how to act and how not to act; what to do and what not to do.

Rule No. 1:

Get yourself a group of editors and political writers of national importance -- men who will submit daily advice on what your policies should be, and how they should be put into effect. I have such a group and I am willing to turn over some of the most assiduous and untiring and consistent of these editorial advisors, of whom I have more than enough -- turn them over to you other candidates and let you take your pick.

For example, there is Mr. Walter Lippmann, whose english is so limpid and so pure that the trigonometry of public affairs is made clear overnight to the kindergartens of America.

And I can offer a Gridiron member, my old buddy, Mr. Mark Sullivan. But I warn you before you take him that he is an incurable optimist. I should be compelled to cling to him if in these three long years there had only been one single expression of pessimism in anything that he has written. When he tells you that all is well with America; that there is

not a cloud on the horizon of America, please discount him just a little bit. His high collars of optimism are as high today as they were in the spring of 1939.

And then there is my friend, David Lawrence. There is a nag to take a long shot on. Once in his quarter of a century of writing he was right. He guessed the election of 1916. It is just within the bounds of possibility that he might guess right once more before he dies.

And there is another Gridiron member, Mr. Arthur Krock, who will guarantee to give you, more clearly than anyone else, the point of view of the farmer, the laborer, and other members of what he would call the "lower classes of America."

In addition to these gentlemen I could give you the names of columnists, news letter writers, inside dopesters, free-lances and slaves. Their judgment and untiring vigilance is at the disposal of you, my fellow candidates. Whichever of you is nominated can obtain the benefit of their guidance. You can reach them - or perhaps it would be more polite to say -

their addresses can be found by calling up the Republican National Headquarters.

Rule No. 3:

Finances are, of course, necessary to your campaign. Efficient machinery awaits you the day you are nominated, but during the following five months there will come times when a few extra million will come in very handy for you. For instance, I see by tonight's paper that in addition to purchasing a Brain Trust of their own, the Republican National Committee has gone in heavily for Detectives. ~~I happened to know this before I read tonight's paper because Henry Stimmer, for sometime past, has had Detectives dogging the very footsteps of my own children and grandchildren.~~ Yes, your expenses will be not only high but unusual. But I want again to help you. When you need that extra million or two, send a telegram addressed just to Wilmington, Delaware, and checks will come by return mail.

Rule No. 3:

Be sure to dress for the part. I remember at a

recent Gridiron Dinner when Arthur Vandenburg was a fellow speaker, he expressed doubt as to whether he had the proper clothes. I told him on that occasion that the entire White House wardrobe was his for the asking - shirts, collars, socks, under-drawers and, in particular, that long, black cutaway coat that I reserve for funerals. Tonight I extend that offer, not only to him but to all of you candidates. With a few alterations that coat can be made to fit whichever one of these gentlemen is chosen to wear it in the months ahead.

Rule No. 4:

This is for the Republican Convention, not for all candidates. You must be sure to choose, as your standard bearer, somebody with a good radio voice, a pleasing smile, and, above all, a "fireside" manner. There is great advantage in these qualities. If the public reaction to the candidate's speech is unfavorable, the blame can be placed on the unwisdom of the Platform, but if the reaction is favorable, it can be credited to the radio voice and the "fireside" manner. Thus universal

satisfaction is provided, and assurance is given in all good "agin the government" journals that their candidate will win.

Rule No. 5:

Be sure to have a Platform of at least 25,000 words. That enables you to pick out any combination to suit the occasion -- you can damn Wall Street in the West; you can damn the farmers in the great cities of the East.

Rule No. 6:

Select a campaign manager whom you do not know -- one who has had no previous contact with the somewhat mundane compulsions of the American political method. Someone with no experience of practical politics, someone, let us say, in the great amateur tradition of Mark Hanna or Boies Penrose or John J. Raskob. Such a selection will embarrass the Administration and, most important of all, provide material for a Gridiron skit at some future dinner.

Rule No. 7:

The last rule is this: In financing your campaign,

a few large contributions are preferable to an infinite number of small ones. In your search for large contributions, make your unit an even dozen. Twelve millionaires are better than one, and this method has the further advantage that it avoids raising the issue of class consciousness. Better still, such a course finances, with a minimum of publicity, the subsidiaries and the literature which will be found necessary by your National Committee. And finally, by a campaign fund thus raised you are introducing the principle of the reciprocal tariff into practical campaign politics.

And, my fellow candidates, when November comes I wonder if you will feel that the dollar has been further devalued or not.

I hope that you will adopt these few simple rules. If you do you might win Vermont and Maine. If you don't, there may not be a single doubtful state.

When next we meet the campaign will be over -- a campaign which for all of us - all Americans in all parties -

will be an outstanding one; outstanding because the issues involved are basic and because there is not a man, woman or child who has not a vital interest at stake in the solution of the great social and economic questions that confront us. Some of the gentlemen whom I have mentioned are personal friends of mine -- and I hope they always will be personal friends of mine. A few of them I regret that I have not had the pleasure of meeting -- I hope that they will be personal friends of mine in the days to come. The views and the principles of these gentlemen are not mine, but I know them to be men of achievement and of character; men whose service - each in his own field - is bound to command our respect and whose patriotic desire for what is best for our people is above reproach.

Should I have the good fortune to be the Democratic nominee, I shall welcome ~~one~~ of these gentlemen to the battle that lies before us, confident that it will be a real campaign - a campaign, the issues of which can be clarified to, and understood by, the 45,000,000 voters of the land.

Meanwhile, and until January 20th, 1937, my primary task is to sit with my awl in the cobbler's shop. The President of the United States must continue his work as a cobbler - mending many soles, building up millions of heels that have run down, and helping along the path of life other millions of our fellow-citizens who are struggling along on their uppers."

Gridiron material

1936

President Gableman, Members of the Gridiron Club and Fellow
Guests:

The Spring dinner of the Gridiron Club provides an unusual pleasure for those who are present, whether as simple spectators or as subjects of the evening's entertainment. The tables are decked with vernal blossoms, the wit is brighter and more penetrating than ever, and the thoughts of all of us are thus directed toward the summer of promise that lies ahead - with more promise for some of those present, I suppose and I hope, than for others.

Glancing around these tables I see a number of gentlemen, and I also miss a number of gentlemen, who, as a group, can be classified under the generic name of Republicans. Not satisfied to let well enough alone, these gentlemen aspire to become President of the United States. Ambition and self-sacrifice are two of the qualities that we attempt to instill into the young. That lesson, in the cases of these gentlemen, seems to have been all too well learned.

One of them is a publisher, who has been translated from the rural delights of New Hampshire to one of the least rural of our great mid-western cities. One of them comes from Ohio - a State known as "the mother of Presidents," which, in his case, he hopes will also prove a grandmother of Presidents. Another is a former journalist, who once presided over the destinies of a newspaper in a manufacturing center famous throughout the world for its popular-priced reproductions of

Queen Anne and Louis Quatorze furniture. He is now in the United States Senate. Still another inhabits Iowa, the most literate State in the Union, and is known as "the farmer's friend." Another, not present, removed himself from his birthplace in a great Eastern industrial kingdom to the broad prairies of Kansas, where the wide horizons and the waving wheat seem to develop a political consciousness of the most pressing character. Another, not present, is a Demosthenes from the Rockies, a great protagonist of peace except when it comes to Republican politics. Still another, not present, is a citizen of California, who ought to know better.

And, in order to be fair about it, your attention is also invited to your speaker, whom I leave you to describe according to your own ideas on that subject. I have no doubt we are an interesting group, because we are all candidates - at least for a nomination.

I have one great advantage that none of these other gentlemen, present or not present, possesses. I have been a candidate - twice: once for Vice-president and once for President. The results of those two campaigns, although for different reasons in each case, I hesitate to mention. Let us confine ourselves tonight to the more recent. The lessons I have learned are invaluable, and I am not one to hold that knowledge secret. Therefore, with complete disregard of time-honored political rules, I am going to initiate these other candidates in some of the requirements of a campaign, to tell them how to act and how not to act, what to do and what not to do.

The first rule is as follows:

Get yourself a group of editors and political writers of national importance who will submit advice on what your policies should be, and how those policies should be put into effect. I have such a group. I am willing to turn over some of the most assiduous and untiring of these editorial advisors, of whom I have more than enough, to these other candidates, and let them take their pick.

For example, there is Mr. Walter Lippman, the scope of whose advice is universal. I also can offer a Gridiron member, Mr. Mark Sullivan. There is one slight drawback to Mr. Sullivan's advice - he is an incurable optimist. If a single expression of pessimism ever crept into Mark's opinions, I should be impelled to cling to him. As it is, I fear I must let him go. The judgment and untiring vigilance of these counsellors I place, fellow-candidates, at your disposal. I have no doubt that at least one of your group, whichever is nominated, will be given the benefit of their guidance, whether it is solicited or not.

The second rule is as follows:

Be sure to dress for the part. I remember at a recent Gridiron dinner, when Arthur Vandenburg was a fellow-speaker, he expressed doubt whether he had the proper clothes. I told him, on that occasion, that the entire White House wardrobe was his for the asking - shirts, collars, Sox, underwear and, in particular, the long black morning-coat that I wear to funerals. This offer I do not confine tonight to one candidate. With a few slight alterations that coat can be made to fit whichever one of these gentlemen is chosen to wear it in the months ahead.

The third rule is as follows:

Select an opponent with a good radio voice and a "fireside" manner. There is one great advantage in such an opponent. If the public reaction to a speech is unfavorable, this can be blamed on the unwisdom of the policies expressed. But if the reaction is favorable, it can be blamed on the radio voice. Thus universal satisfaction is provided, and assurance given in all good Republican journals that the opposing candidate can't win.

The fourth rule is as follows:

Be sure to have a platform of at least 25,000 words. This reduces the issues to their simplest form, avoids confusing the voter and makes it impossible for the platform to be placed on a dining-room table.

The fifth rule is:

Select a campaign manager whom you do not know, who has had no previous contact with the somewhat mundane compulsions of the American political method. Be sure to get someone with no experience of practical politics, someone in the great amateur tradition of Mark Hanna or Boies Penrose. This will embarrass the Opposition and provide material for a Gridiron song at some future dinner.

The sixth and last rule is:

In financing your campaign, a few large contributions are preferable to an infinite number of small ones. In the search for large contributors, the unit should be an even dozen. Twelve millionaires are better than one, and this method has the further advantage that it avoids raising the issue of class consciousness. No more progressive

step could be taken than to introduce the principle of the reciprocal tariff into practical politics.

With the adoption of these few, simple rules, I feel sure that your canvass will be an outstanding success.

And this campaign that lies ahead of us should be an outstanding one, because the issues involved are basic, because there is not a man, woman or child in the United States who has not a vital interest at stake in the solution of the great social and economic questions that confront us. Some of these Republican gentlemen whom I have mentioned are personal friends of mine; with some of them I have been brought into frequent official contact; a few of them I regret that I have not had the pleasure of meeting. The views and the principles of some of these gentlemen are not mine, but I know them to be men of achievement and of character, whose service - each in his own field - is bound to command our respect, and whose patriotic desire for what is best for our people is above reproach. Should I have the good fortune to be the Democratic nominee, I shall welcome one of these gentlemen to the battle that lies before us, confident that it will be a real campaign, and one, I am sure, that will provide ample material for the Gridiron Club at its dinner in December.

P.P.H.
10/10

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 4, 1936. *file*

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. MCINTYRE:

Henry Suydam just telephoned suggesting that he submit this afternoon a draft of suggestions for the President's speech at the Gridiron Club, his thought being that the President might like to read this draft and talk with him about it afterwards.

The opposition speaker Saturday night will be Frank Kent instead of Dr. Butler of Columbia. Suydam said that Presidential candidates who will be present will be Senator Vandenberg, Frank Knox and Charles P. Taft. Neither Governor Landon nor Senator Borah will be present.

Henry thinks it would be well for the President to make some kidding remarks giving advice to candidates who are running for the Presidency from one who has had experience in that line, then perhaps a brief conclusion on a serious vein.

Suydam thought it would aid the President if he submitted something to him in advance, and then talked with the President about it after the President had had time to consider the suggestions.

W. D. H.

WILLIAM D. HACKETT

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 18, 1936.

file

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. EARLY:

Here is the copy of Suydam's
draft for the Gridiron speech which I
turned over to McIntyre on Thursday.

W.D.H.

William D. Hassett



President Gableman, Members of the Gridiron Club and Fellow
Quests:

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