

April 13, 1940

[Gridiron Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

1591

GRIDIRON DINNER

APRIL 13, 1940

Nine terms! Gentlemen, it is too much! There ought to be a law against it. At least there ought to be an American tradition against it. One of those absolutely sacred American traditions against more than eight terms.

While I agree with that galaxy of ^{willing Barkiss} ~~Deachuses~~ who insist that no man is big enough to refuse the Presidency, ^{at least on the 1st instance} nevertheless, I do not think any man should be compelled to accept it ^{as many do -} ~~nine~~ times.

I know people, many of them in this room, who do not think that any man ought to serve even a second term. I strongly suspect that there are men in this room who want to whittle even that down so far as certain other gentlemen, ^{in regard to} also present, are concerned. ~~For~~ ^{and what} the other fellows, they are fierce believers in the "no-term tradition". Let that chip fall where it may.

But nine terms -- that is, indeed, a terrible prospect to face. I hope you will give generous applause when I express the wish that all of you who are here tonight will give me your aid and support in limiting the American tradition hereafter to eight terms. ^{And the ~~prospect~~ ^{prospect} is only partly} alleviated by the knowledge that one of the rewards is the privilege of having a ringside seat at these Gridiron Dinners.

91 But, after all, it is possible to pay too much for your supper.

However, speaking just for background and not "off the record", I do enjoy these dinners and I always will.

I enjoy seeing all the old familiar faces, beaming as they do tonight with the brightspirit of good-will and friendship for this Administration.

Yes, I enjoy all the old familiar gags -- the changeless humor of the horse and buggy variety that I have come to love.

I enjoy the haunting melody of the old tunes of my childhood the lusty, gusty, hairy choruses -- and the Marines always

keeping the situation well in hand.

*- Miss All
Taylor B. Brownson
Tonight*

All the old familiar faces. It is a never ending source of wonderment and mystery to me -- the wealth and the ^{power} ~~brains~~ that you manage to crowd into this one room.

Standing here I couldn't toss a bouquet or a biscuit out into this sea of hard-boiled, smiling faces without hitting a man qualified, on the one account or the other, to be an American Senator or an American Diplomat. ^{It} I am sorry I did not think of that before I ate my biscuit. But perhaps it is just as well, for if I had hit somebody with said biscuit I would have been accused of tossing the mantle of Elijah on the new Elisha.

Yon bearded sphinx glowering at me is a bit disconcerting to humor or an attempt at it. But I must pay tribute to the Gridiron Club by saying that most of its members really have a sense of humor. That does not apply to the minority of them who are columnists, and interpreters, and commentators -- in their case they have a very highly developed sense of rumor.

And after seven long years here I note another characteristic of our hosts of tonight. A member of the Club smiles and crows and chortles when he is holding the gridiron -- but if somebody else gets hold of that gridiron and looks sternly in his direction, he runs like hell.

Tonight I am disposed to register only one mild complaint. Fun is fun but I submit that even in your fun you should be fair -- and you were not entirely fair at one point tonight. I refer to the otherwise amusing skit dealing with violators of the law. The skit in which Senator Tobey wore his horizontal striped suit. I am not complaining about his costume, for it is very becoming and appropriate to him.

But in the course of that skit Jim Wright said that I had refused to tell whether or not I had a mortgage on that little old house on Pennsylvania Avenue. The fact is that I did not refuse to tell at all. I told the census taker that I have no mortgages on any of ^{my} real estate holdings at Hyde Park, in Warm Springs or ⁱⁿ Washington.

There is this to be said, however, about that dear old place around the corner. Hanging in one of the closets there is that suit of clothes which I once promised to Arthur Vandenberg -- seven years ago right in this room. Yes, I promised it to him to wear at his Inauguration. ^H You remember that it consists of a correct morning coat and a pair of striped trousers, getting, I am sorry to say, a little bit out of style -- still good enough, however, to wear to Inaugurations and funerals. ^H Arthur has not called for it yet and, frankly, I am wondering if he ever will. We keep it in moth balls and it will still be good enough for next January but I am afraid that is the last chance for Arthur — and I will have to give it away to the old-clothes man — because the trousers are much too big in every dimension for either Bobby Taft or Tommy Dewey -- and I ^{don't} ~~don't~~ think they will grow enough to be able to wear them until 1944 or later.

My little Dutch boy friend has two compliments coming to him. Through all these years he has been standing bravely with his thumb in the hole in the dike. He and John etcetera Hamilton and a lot of others of my Republican friends thought there was a ^{domestic} flood on the other side of that dike. They prophesied the ^{domestic} flood that would overwhelm their nation. They screamed in chorus to warn their families against the impending inundation -- and, of course, everybody knows today, ~~that~~ on both sides of that dike, that there has not been any danger of drowning during all these seven years. But, nevertheless, I take my hat off to them for ^{their charming and innocent and their childlike} keeping their thumbs in the dike. ^{faith in}

And Arthur, though perhaps he does not know it, got off, in one of his rare radio speeches, a line that will find its place among famous quotations. He said "A state of mind is the hardest thing possible to defeat".

Nothing could be truer, even from the standpoint of a man on a flying trapeze. You cannot defeat a state of mind by sticking your thumb in the dike or by sticking your tongue in your cheek -- or, as a lot of people are coming to realize, by sticking your neck into a primary.

It is none of our business -- us Democrats -- what goes on in a certain other political party. That trapeze act is good and the rest of the circus that has come to town is good. But I always remember that when the circus came to the County seat in Dutchess County, when I was a boy, a lot of people -- mostly the very ^{immature up all ways} ~~young~~ -- got a big kick out of it and ran up and down the streets of the town and followed the band and made noises like the elephant and the octopus -- and after the big show moved on to Hudson and Albany the life of our town went on just as it had before. I am inclined to think that that little comparison is understood better by the man on the street than it is by the clowns and the advance agents of the circus.

One of those advance agents is the good ^{the sincere and the scholarly Prof.} Dr. Glenn Frank,

who honors us with his presence tonight. He is ballyhooing one of the smaller circuses -- a seventeen million circus following in the footsteps of a twenty-eight million circus, and his big posters on all the signboards are telling the country-side that his circus, though smaller, contains almost all of the attractive features of the bigger show, ^{but} ~~and~~ that his girls are better looking ^{and a little less modest} than my girls.

This Republican confession probably is not entirely frank, but even the other one hundred and ninety-nine bills ^{posters of}

^{changes} ~~posters~~ seem to agree that their circus this year embodies a ~~participation~~ ^{They say} of heart. ^{join} If we can't lick 'em, let's join 'em. I say, let them come in but not on their own terms.

Their proposal is not merely to join the New Deal but to take over the management. And looking around me again, I

don't think any of them have quite grown up to that. ^{And} my old man Jim Farley says they'll be big enough in 1960. And Jim knows better.

After all, this dinner is a good deal of a relief for all of us -- because for an hour or two it takes our minds off of what we know to be the more serious happenings of today and the more serious threats of tomorrow.

Each day the news, through Press and Radio, is making Americans everywhere realize that the future of the United States and the future of all the other people who dwell in the three Americas will be affected for good or for evil, whether we like it or not, by the wars that rage on other Continents.

My one regret during these recent weeks was the suggestion, by one who seeks the highest public office, ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~United~~, that the United States not only must and will keep out of wars in Europe and Asia -- he is right in that -- but also that the United States has no interest and will never have any interest in the restoration of peace in the world.

That suggestion is contrary to the highest ideals of the American people; it is contrary to the policy of the American Government; it is contrary to the American wish that we do everything possible by peaceful means to help *bring in today and 16* bring lasting peace among the nations of the world; it is contrary to American ideals based on the simplest teachings of Christianity -- American ideals that look to the security of the American people, not just by building up our Army and our Navy, but also by encouraging ^{all} ~~other~~ nations with us to reduce armaments and to ^{conduct} ~~conduct~~ *conduct* the commercial and cultural relations among all nations.

All people in this room are ready to give lip-service to the proposition that domestic politics stop at the sea shore. It is a pity, therefore, that any aspirants for public office should honor that precept in the breach by seeking to expand domestic politics into the foreign field.

ff In our attitude toward wars abroad, we can afford to be at one among ourselves. In our attitude toward staying out

of those wars, we can equally afford to be at one among ourselves. And in our desire to further the cause of peace and speak out boldly against the cause of aggression, we can afford to be at one among ourselves -- mere vote seekers to the contrary notwithstanding.

In tomorrow morning's papers you will read the following statement issued by me tonight:

"Force and military aggression are once more on the march against small nations, in this instance through the invasion of Denmark and Norway. These two nations have won and maintained during a period of many generations the respect and regard not only of the American people, but of all peoples, because of their observance of the highest standards of national and international conduct.

"The Government of the United States has on the occasion of recent invasions strongly expressed its disapprobation of such unlawful exercise of force.

The Government -12-

It here reiterates, with undiminished emphasis,
its point of view as expressed on those occasions.
If civilization is to survive, the rights of the
smaller nations to independence, to their
territorial integrity, and to the unimpeded
opportunity for self-government must be respected
by their more powerful neighbors."

That needs no elaboration or elucidation. It speaks, I hope
I think, the thought of ~~the~~ *the people of the*
A *United States of America*

Franklin D. Roosevelt
Orig. reading copy

(Note: Final skit deals with Sphinx during ninth term)

Nine terms! Gentlemen, it is too much! There ought to be a law against it. At least, there ~~ought~~^{ought} to be an American Tradition, an absolutely sacred American tradition against more than eight terms. While I agree with something I once heard said--it doesn't matter who said it; anyone here might have said it under proper circumstances--while I agree that no man is big enough to refuse the Presidency, I don't think any man should be asked to accept it nine times!

I know people who don't think any man ought to ~~serve even~~^{serve even} a second term. And there are men in this room, I strongly suspect, who want to whittle that down as far as certain other gentlemen also present are concerned. ~~However, for the other fellow~~ For the other fellow, they are fierce believers in the No-Term Tradition. Take a look around you.

Nine terms! That is indeed a terrible prospect to face and it is only partly alleviated by the knowledge that one of the rewards is the privilege of a ring side seat at these dinners. After all, it is possible to pay too much for your supper.

However, I do enjoy the dinners--and I always will. I enjoy seeing all the old familiar faces, beaming with the bright spirit of good will for this administration. I enjoy all the old familiar gags, the happy horse and buggy humor I have come to love, the surprise entrances heralded by the good old Gridiron wind-up, "Here he comes now." I enjoy the haunting melody of the old tunes, the lusty, gusty choruses and the Marines, always keeping the situation well in hand. I do enjoy the dinners. I wouldn't give them up for anything.

All the old familiar faces. It is a never-ending source of wonderment to me--the wealth and brains you manage to crowd into this one room. Standing here I couldn't toss a bouquet--or a biscuit--out into this sea of smiling faces without hitting a man qualified on the one

MEETERN UNION

2.

account or the other to be an American diplomat. I'm sorry I didn't think of that before I ate my biscuit, but yon bearded Sphinx was glowering at me and I was disconcerted. (A)

If I may refer again to the nature of the Gridiron humor, gentlemen, --and I still maintain it is the old things we love best--I am disposed to register one mild complaint. Fun is fun, but I submit that even in your fun you should be fair. You were not entirely fair at one point tonight. I refer to the otherwise amusing skit dealing with violators of the law, the skit in which Senator Tobey wore his horizontal-striped suit--although it is not about the Senator's costume that I am complaining; indeed, it is very becoming to him.

But in the course of that skit Jim Wright---oh, I'm sorry Jim; I didn't mean to give you away--one of the actors said that I had refused to tell whether or not I had a mortgage on that place on Pennsylvania Avenue. The fact is, I didn't refuse to tell. I told all. An 'invasion of my personal privacy' perhaps, but I did not resent it. I told the census-taker and he put it down.

So if you have a grievance it is not against me and it is not against the census-taker. It is against Congress. Congress decrees that the census man mustn't tell the neighbors. And the census men, Senator Tobey notwithstanding, obey the Congress. So the census-taker is in the clear and I'm in the clear--and there's nothing further to be said --at the moment, anyhow--about the mortgage on the old home place.

There is this to be said, however, about that dear old place itself. Hanging in one of the closets there is a suit of clothes that I once promised to Arthur Vandenberg. Seven years ago, right in this room, I promised it to him. It consists of what the papers call a correct morning coat and a pair of striped trousers; you know, the sort of thing one wears to one's inaugurations. Well, Arthur has never called for it and I am wondering if

UNITED STATES PRESERVE
MEXICAN UNION

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he ever will. I'm wondering, as a matter of fact, if I won't have to have it altered~~up~~---if I won't even have to have the trousers out down. Just as a ~~dam~~ precaution, anyway. (Note - Sewery)

And I shall regret it in a way, if my fears are fulfilled. For I have always admired Arthur in the role of the little Dutch boy with his thumb in the dykes holding back the flood. I've admired him, although being a better Dutchman than he is, & I've always known there was no very good basis for the tale of ~~Abraham~~ that brave little Dutch boy. We Dutchmen (use Dutch word for same) know you can't stop a real flood by sticking your thumb in a dyke, or even by sticking your chin ~~into~~ out in Wisconsin and Nebraska. Matter of fact, I think Arthur knows it, for he said something the other day that indicates he has some understanding of great natural forces. In the course of one of his rare radio speeches, he remarked: "A state of mind is the hardest thing possible to defeat."

Nothing could be truer, even from the standpoint of a man on a flying trapeze. (Vandenberg song in Republican skit.) You can't defeat a state of mind, for instance, by sticking your tongue in your cheek. You can't defeat a state of mind at all. This the senior Senator from Michigan knows. There may be some who do not know it. There may be some willing to waste their time storming up and down the country, battling furiously against the country's state of mind--but not Arthur. He knows that, in a democracy, you can't defeat a state of mind, and he said so in a recent magazine article characterized by the usual ifs and buts but showing that even on a trapeze a man knows which way is up and which way is down.

Is it none of our business--us Democrats --what goes on in a certain other political party. But we can't help noting what is happening to the man on the flying trapeze. And we can't help sympathizing with him because so many other people do. They keep telling us about the man on the man on the flying trapeze. For Arthur's sake, and sharing none of his trepidation

MEETERN UNION

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about that man, I am going to recall one of Alben Barkley's--or was it Happy Chandler's--stories. It was about a big burly darky and a tough, bantam darky who got into a fight. The little fellow wrapped himself around the giant and hung on. The big fellow finally got loose but in telling about it, he said: "I never got so tired of one nigger in my life."

But Arthur never really was the only Republican on that trapeze. There are ~~nowhere~~ at least 200 others who have reached his intelligent conclusion that you cannot compete with ~~newspapers, radio, television, and the~~ ~~newspapers, radio, television, and the~~ a state of mind. I refer for one thing to the committee on party program, headed by the good Doctor Glenn Frank, who honors us with his presence tonight. The result of their long labors and hard study was given to us some weeks ago under the title, "A Program for Dynamic America. A Statement of Republican Principles." Arthur himself couldn't have done a better job of iffing and butting, hanging all the while to the ~~subjective~~ "objectives" of this administration. And I believe I could have written a better title for this interesting document. I would have called it, "If You Can't Lick 'Em--Jine 'Em." For truly that is what the Noble Two Hundred ~~Proposes~~ Proposes to do.

Speaking as far as I may for the New Deal, I would say they are welcome. This ~~man~~ Republican confession probably is not entirely Frank, but even the other 199 seem to agree that ~~reform~~ it signalizes reform and purification of heart. I would say--let them come in; but not on their own terms. For their proposal is not merely to join the New Deal but to take over the management. And I don't believe, looking around me again, that any of them have quite grown up to that.

Nevertheless, this conversion of Republican leaders, including their foremost talking Sphinxes--is truly heartening. It is one more demonstration that democracy works, one more proof that for democracy the impossible does not exist. Who would have said twenty years ago that this could be done? Who would have said it ten years ago? Yet the American people have done it and

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and have done it in seven short years, surpassing in their grasp of the idea of coalition anything that ever came out of Grand Rapids. Understand, I am not giving this administration or even the Democratic Party credit for having planned it that way. No, our aims and hopes, back in '32, were not that ambitious. We thought we were pretty good, but not ~~anywhere~~ that good. And we didn't do the job. The American people did it. And I now declare, without fear of successful contradiction, that in accomplishing this reform of Republican leadership the American people have done something!

~~Now we are going to~~

Seriously, etc.

~~So I come now to Mr. Fairwell, taking a cue from my good friend~~

~~Arthur Vandenberg. But it is Fairwell~~

(Notes: VP Garner will be there. Also Chief Justice Hughes, who is 78 today, April ~~and~~ 11. So also Ministers of Denmark, Norway and Finland. Fairless of US Steel. Governor of Minnesota.)

PRESS MESSAGE
WESTERN UNION

WESTERN UNION PRESS MESSAGE

DR. M. MATHIAS
PRESIDENT

NEWCOMB CARLTON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

J. G. WILLEVER
FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

GRIDIRON CLUB

APRIL 13, 1940

*Jan.
1940 12.30.
- Bull Connor*

INSERT A

And by the way, most of the members of the Gridiron Club have -- really have -- a sense of humor. That small minority of them -- the columnists, the interpreters and the commentators -- they have a highly developed sense of rumor. ^{CH} After seven long years here I note another characteristic of our hosts of tonight. A member of the Club smiles and crows when he is holding the gridiron but if somebody else gets hold of that gridiron and looks sternly in his direction, he runs like hell.

GRIDIRON CLUB

There is only one great advantage that Arthur would have as a candidate over Bob or Tom. These Dutch names like Roosevelt and Vandenberg are almost impossible to find words to rhyme with. Think of the adjectives that rhyme with Dewey; think of the adjectives that rhyme with Taft.

GRIDIRON CLUB

After all in these days this dinner is a good deal of a relief for all of us because for an hour or two it takes our minds off of what we know to be the more serious happenings of today and the more serious threats of tomorrow.

GRIDIRON CLUB

Back in the pre-Convention campaign in 1932 several astrologists and soothsayers furnished me with horoscopes -- my horoscopes -- and the real reason that I let my name go before that Convention was that they were all agreed that things went by threes. There had been two Adamses, there had been two Harrisons, and the stars said that the time was ripe for another President who would bear the name of a former President. But they told me, too, that long expanses of time - half centuries -- went by in the stars before coincidences like that could happen again. And perhaps some day, who can tell, there will be another Lincoln, another Grand, another Wilson, or even another Taft, but the stars say it is a long ways off.

GRIDIRON CLUB

Each day the news, through the Press and the Radio, is making the men and women and children of this country realize that the future of the United States and the future of all the other people who dwell in the three Americas will be effected for good or for evil, whether we like it or not, by the wars that rage on other continents.

My one regret during these recent weeks was the suggestion by one who seeks the highest public office that the United States not only has no interest in the current events in Europe and Asia and will keep wholly apart from them -- he is right if he means that we are not going to war -- but also that the United States has no interest and will never have any interest in the restoration of peace in the world. That suggestion is contrary to the highest ideals of the American people -- contrary to the ideals of the American people who support lasting peace among the nations of the world -- American ideals based on the simplest teachings of Christianity; American ideals that look to the security of the American people, not just be building up our Army and our Navy, but also by encouraging other nations with us to reduce armaments and to transfer our activities to the extension of commercial and cultural relations

among all nations. And I think it is a pity that any aspirants for public office should seek votes at the expense of principle.

Many people in this room are ready to give lip-service to the proposition that domestic politics stop at the coast line. I hope that that will be observed during the balance of the year 1940 in the fact and not in the breach as it has been during the past year.

GRIDIRON DINNER

APRIL 13, 1940

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I think, the thought of America.

INAUGURATION SKIT

Enter parade, headed by extra members of Marine Band, playing "The Victors." Cast in dress suits, top hats and canes, carrying transparencies labeled "Michigan Forever," "Michigan in the Saddle," "Michigan Man for President."

Chorus sings as it reaches stage:

Hail to the victors valiant,
Hail to the conq'ring heroes,
Hail, Hail to Michigan,
The leaders and best

Hail to the victors valiant
Hail to the conq'ring heroes,
Hail, Hail to Michigan,
The champions of the west.

At conclusion, Bell steps forward:

Bell: A few moments ago, gentlemen of the Gridiron audience, we hinted to you in song that we would shortly give the answer to that all-pervading question: "Who?" That matter has been settled. We are now ready to show you the man who is to be President.

Hayden: Yes. And I have right here a description of that man. He is here tonight and he will recognize this description.

Bell: Very well, proceed.

Hayden: In the first place he is an alumnus of the University of Michigan.

(Spot swings to Wheeler, who rises.)

Bell: There he is. It's Senator Burton K. Wheeler. He's an alumnus of the University of Michigan.

Hayden: Oh no. Sit down, Burt Wheeler. You were born in Massachusetts. Our man is not only an alumnus of the University of Michigan, he was born in Michigan.

(Spotlight swings to Dewey, who rises.)

Bell: Well, we have him now. There's Tom Dewey. He was born in Owosso and he's an alumnus of the University of Michigan. Won't Dewey do?

Inauguration Skit--2

Hayden: No, no, no. He's a Michigander all right but there's another qualification he doesn't fit. According to this description, our man was born in Michigan, is an alumnus of the University of Michigan and is prominent in Washington. Dewey isn't - yet.

(Spot shifts to Frank Murphy, who rises.)

Bell: There you are. You certainly must be referring to Justice Frank Murphy. He is a native of Michigan, came out of the University of Michigan and he's in Washington for life, maybe.

Hayden: Wrong again. The president I am talking about was born in Michigan, graduated from the University of Michigan, is prominent in Washington and comes from Grand Rapids, not Detroit.

(Spot shifts to Vandenberg, who rises.)

Bell: Oh ho! It's Arthur Vandenberg. Born in Grand Rapids. Alumnus of the University of Michigan. Prominent in Washington. Of course, it's Vandenberg. It can't be anybody else.

Hayden: No. You are wrong again. This man---

President Roosevelt interrupts (spot shifts to him). Wait a minute.

Hayden: The President of the United States has something to say.

President Roosevelt: I've been to these dinners before. You can't fool me. The man you are talking about is Mark Foote, the new president of the Gridiron Club.

Hayden: You are right, Mr. President Roosevelt. We are about to inaugurate as President of the Gridiron Club a native son Michigan alumnus from Grand Rapids who became prominent in Washington as correspondent of the Booth Newspapers long before either you or Arthur Vandenberg got here. ^{Mr. Foote}, it is a great honor to present to you this ^{gavel} as a symbol of your presidency for the year 1940.

Foote: Mr. Chairman and members---

(President Roosevelt tugs at Foote's arm.
Whispers to him.)

Foote: That's a good idea, Mr. President. I won't say anything now about not taking another term.

(Band strikes up "The Victors." Exit chorus singing.)