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Speech Drafts: Message to Congress Recommending Legislation, November 5, 1937

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TO THE CONGRESS:

With the realization that important measures of legislation are pending before this Congress and that other matters require early consideration, I issued a call for an extraordinary session ~~of the Congress~~ with the thought that the work of the regular session, beginning ~~in~~ next January, would be expedited.

Since the adjournment of the last session there has been a marked recession in industrial production and in purchasing, following a fairly steady advance for more than four years. This decline, though it has not reached serious proportions, has the effect of decreasing the national income -- and that is a matter for our definite concern.

During the adjournment of the Congress I have sought to avail myself of the wisdom and advice ~~in the minds~~ of industrial and financial leaders, of the managers of small business ~~men and~~ of many kinds, and of representatives of agriculture and of labor. Much advice and many suggestions have been given to me and to other members of the Executive Branch of the Government. Many of these recommendations are consistent with each other; many are at complete variance. A long experience leads me to place great value on the obtaining of suggestions from

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every possible source, but leads me also to believe that ~~those who imply that simple~~ simple answers or simple slogans will not solve complex problems which baffle the wit of the statesmanship of the world today. ~~are merely playing~~ To forget this is to play with the lives of men and women whose ultimate security is a society of good-will -- a cordial and more confident cooperation between every kind of citizen and his government.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient wisdom in the discussions that I have sought not only to check ~~this~~ present recession but to lay the ground work of ~~better~~ more permanent assurance, ~~against the threat of later recessions~~. It rests not only with the Government of the United States to say how far this recession shall go. It rests equally with the people. It need not proceed further if all of us use the knowledge gained in recent years.

Obviously the most important thing at the present juncture is to increase employment, increasing therewith the use of capital. The objectives of the nation in this respect cover of necessity a wide field -- so many subjects that it is impossible in this Message to cover them all. A little later I will address you further in regard to certain new proposals such as the means of the encouragement of private capital to enter the field of new housing on a large scale -- a field

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MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

REORGANIZATION

Last January I presented for the consideration of the Congress the need of making possible the improvement of administrative management in the Executive Branch of the Government. Five principle objectives were outlined:

1. The placing of executive activities in regular executive departments by Executive Order issued in accordance with standards set by law, together with the creation of one or more additional departments and a National Resources Planning Agency. In this connection it is worthwhile emphasing that it has been repeatedly and falsely alleged that effort was being made to place legislative and judicial functions, heretofore delegated or assigned by the Congress, to Federal Commissions. It is a pity that the problem has by some been thus obscured. The sole object is, of course, to place purely executive functions of commissions under the constitutional responsibility of the President, for the very good reason that the Constitution gives sole executive responsibility to the President.

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MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

WAGES AND HOURS

In the interval since the adjournment of the last session there has been ample opportunity for discussion of the many principles of Federal Wage and Hour legislation. The question has been before Labor Conventions, Employers' Associations and many other groups. I myself have sounded out opinion on this subject over a wide section of territory. I believe that the country as a whole recognized, the need for immediate congressional action if we are to maintain and improve the standard of living for our working population and hold up the wage income and the purchasing power of the nation against recessive factors in the general industrial situation.

I believe that the country as a whole recognizes the desirability to work toward a more uniform standard of living and purchasing power in every part of the country.

I believe the country as a whole appreciates that far too many American workers are receiving today pay so low that they pull down the prosperity of the rest of their fellow citizens.

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WAGES AND HOURS

This does not mean that Government action calls for immediate uniformity of standards of wages and hours; that is an ultimate goal. Meanwhile, provision can be made for a certain flexibility established so that industries in the various sections of the country may gradually adapt themselves to progressively better labor conditions.

There are geographic and industrial diversities which, as I have said, practical statesmanship cannot well ignore. Nevertheless, it is high time that we had legislation relating to the manufacture of goods moving in interstate commerce, which will accomplish two immediate major purposes. First, it is time to get rid of rates of pay which necessitate a sub-standard scale of living on the part of the recipient. Second, it is time to end the unsound practice of some communities which seek new industries by offering as the principle attraction that labor is more plentiful and much cheaper than in other communities. The Congress should reiterate to them the oft-repeated pledge that labor is not a mere commodity.

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MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

AGRICULTURE

One of the principle desires of the Congress on reconvening will, I am confident, be the enactment of a new and permanent National Farm Act. Intention to pass such an Act was declared by the Congress in Joint Resolution last summer. Great as the need was then, that need is greater still today.

In the weeks that have intervened, farmers have faced once more acute surpluses and falling prices. Cotton farmers are harvesting the largest cotton crop in all our history -- five million bales more than the markets of this country and the world have been accustomed to take. Corn farmers and potato farmers are harvesting crops that threaten to crush the farmers who have produced this plenty. Other producing groups wonder how soon they, too, will be the victims of surplus uncontrolled.

Further measures are needed to prevent farm surplus from inviting fresh price collapse, but they must also safeguard farmers against the hazards of crop failure. We need a good ALL WEATHER farm plan -- a plan that uses the surpluses of one year to make up for the shortages of the next.

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Out of the experience of the last five years we have learned that action against economic disaster can be successfully taken by farmers with the aid of the Government.

We have regard for the Constitution. The Congress will continue to discharge its constitutional duty to promote the general welfare. I believe that the Courts themselves are coming to have increasing regard for the true nature of the Constitution as a broad charter of democratic government which can function under the conditions of today.

Although vital portions of the Agricultural Adjustment Act were set aside nearly two years ago by the Supreme Court, Acts of Congress to improve labor relations and assure workers' security have been upheld since then. In these latter decisions the powers of the Federal Government to regulate commerce between the States and to tax and to spend for the general welfare have been clearly recognized. I hope and believe that the Supreme Court will not again deny to farmers the protection which it now accords to others. The Congress can constitutionally write a new Farm Act that will be well within the broad meaning and purpose of the Constitution.

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We have regard for the United States Treasury. I have already expressed my view that if the new Farm Act provides for expenditure of funds beyond those planned in the regular budget, means of providing an equal amount of revenue must be found. May I reiterate that with all the emphasis I can give?

We have regard for the fertility of our soil. We have begun to assist farmers to stop soil waste and save the good soil that remains. Any sound, longtime program must have soil conservation as a primary goal.

We must have regard for the welfare of farm families. We must make sure, as a long-time national policy, that farmers have a fair share in the national income; in so doing, farm buying power will keep city factories running.

Finally, we have regard for the American democratic way. Farm programs cannot long succeed unless they have the active support of the farmers who take part in them. They must be planned and administered, so far as possible, by the farmers themselves. Here again, majority rule seems logical. If and when huge surpluses in any one crop threaten to engulf all the producers of that crop, our laws should provide ways by which a small minority may be kept from

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destroying the proceeds of the toil of the great majority.

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