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Franklin D Roosevelt

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Franklin D Roosevelt

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EDITORS:

The following Inaugural Address of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt is hereby released at noon, Tuesday, January 1st, 1929, unless otherwise ordered by wire. It must not be quoted from, referred to, or commented upon in any manner prior to that time.

*Governor and Mrs. Smith, Mr. Secretary of State, my friends:*

This day is notable not so much for the inauguration of a new Governor as that it marks the close of the term of a Governor who has been our Chief Executive for eight years.

I am certain that no Governor in the long history of the state has accomplished more than he in definite improvement of the structure of our state government, in the wise, efficient and honorable administration of its affairs, and finally in his possession of that vibrant understanding heart attuned to the needs and hopes of the men, the women and the children who form the sovereignty known as "the People of the State of New York."

To Alfred E. Smith, a public servant of true greatness, I extend on behalf of our citizens our affectionate greetings, our wishes for his good health and happiness and our prayer that God will watch over him and his in the years to come.

It is a proud thing to be a citizen of the State of New York, not because of our great population and our natural resources, nor on account of our industries, our trade, or our agricultural development, but because the citizens of this state more than any other state in the union, have grown to realize the inter-dependence on each other which modern civilization has created.

Under the leadership of the great Governor whose place you have selected me to fill has come a willingness on our part to give as well as to receive, to aid, through the agency of the state, the well-being of the men and women who, by their toil, have made our material prosperity possible.

I object to having this spirit of personal civil responsibility to the state and to the individual which has placed New York in the lead as a progressive commonwealth, described as "humanitarian." It is far more than that. It is the recognition that our civilization cannot endure unless we, as individuals, realize our personal responsibility to and dependency on the rest of the world. For it is literally true that the "self-supporting" man or

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woman has become as extinct as the man of the stone age. Without the help of thousands of others, any one of us would die, naked and starved. Consider the bread upon our table, the clothes upon our backs, the luxuries that make life pleasant; how many men worked in sunlit fields, in dark mines, in the fierce heat of molten metal, and among the looms and wheels of countless factories, in order to create them for our use and enjoyment.

I am proud that we of this state have grown to realize this dependence, and, what is more important, have also come to know that we, as individuals, in our turn must give our time and our intelligence to help those who have helped us. To secure more of life's pleasures for the farmer; to guard the toilers in the factories and to insure them a fair wage and protection from the dangers of their trades; to compensate them by adequate insurance for injuries received while working for us, to open the doors of knowledge to their children more widely, to aid those who are crippled and ill, to pursue with strict justice, all evil persons who prey upon their fellow men, and at the same time, by intelligent and helpful sympathy, to lead wrong doers into right paths. All of these great aims of life are more fully realized here than in any other state in the union. We have but started on the road, and we have far to go; but during the last six years in particular, the people of this state have shown their impatience of those who seek to make such things a football of politics or by blind unintelligent obstruction, attempt to bar the road to Progress.

Most gratifying of all, perhaps, is the practical way in which we have set about to take the first step toward this higher civilization, for, first of all, has been the need to set our machinery of government in order. If we are to reach these aims efficiently without needless waste of time or money we must continue the efforts to simplify and modernize. You cannot build a modern dynamo with the ancient forge and bellows of the mediaeval blacksmith. The modernization of our administrative procedure, not alone that of the state, but also of those other vital units of counties, of cities, of towns and of villages, must be accomplished; and while in the unit of the state we have almost reached our goal, I want to emphasize that in the other units we have a long road to travel.

Each one of us must realize the necessity of our personal interest, not only toward our fellow citizens, but in the government itself. You must watch, as a public duty, what is done and what is not done at Albany. You must understand the issues that arise in the Legislature, and the recommendations made by

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your Governor, and judge for yourselves if they are right or wrong. If you find them right it is your duty as citizens on next election day to repudiate those who oppose, and to support by your vote those who strive for their accomplishment.

I want to call particularly on the public press of this state in whose high standards I have the greatest confidence, to devote more space to the explanation and consideration of such legislation as may come up this year, for no matter how willing the individual citizen may be to support wise and progressive measures, it is only through the press, and I mean not only our great dailies but their smaller sisters in the rural districts, that our electorate can learn and understand what is going on.

There are many puzzling problems to be solved. I will here mention but three. In the brief time that I have been speaking to you, there has run to waste on their paths toward the sea, enough power from our rivers to have turned the wheels of a thousand factories, to have lit a million farmers' homes—power which nature has supplied us through the gift of God. It is intolerable that the utilization of this stupendous heritage should be longer delayed by petty squabbles and partisan dispute. Time will not solve the problem; it will be more difficult as time goes on to reach a fair conclusion. It must be solved now.

I should like to state clearly the outstanding features of the problem itself. First, it is agreed, I think, that the water power of the state should belong to all the people. There was, perhaps, some excuse for careless legislative gift of power sites in the days when it was of no seemingly great importance. There can be no such excuse now. The title to this power must vest forever in the people of this state. No commission, no, not the Legislature itself has any right to give, for any consideration whatever, a single potential kilowatt in virtual perpetuity to any person or corporation whatsoever. The Legislature in this matter is but the trustee of the people, and it is their solemn duty to administer such heritage so as most greatly to benefit the whole people. On this point there can be no dispute.

It is also the duty of our legislative bodies to see that this power, which belongs to all the people, is transformed into usable electrical energy and distributed to them at the lowest possible cost. It is our power; and no inordinate profits must be allowed to those who act as the people's agents in bringing this power to their homes and workshops. If we keep these two fundamental facts before us, half of the problem disappears.

There remains the technical question as to which of several methods will bring this power to our doors with the least expense.

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Let me here make clear the three divisions of this technical side of the question.

First, the construction of the dams, the erection of power houses and the installation of the turbines necessary to convert the force of the falling water into electricity.

Second, the construction of many thousands of miles of transmission lines to bring the current so produced to the smaller distributing centers throughout the state; and

Third, the final distribution of this power into thousands of homes and factories.

How much of this shall be undertaken by the state, how much of this carried out by properly regulated private enterprises, how much of this by some combination of the two, is the practical question that we have before us. And in the consideration of the question I want to warn the people of this state against too hasty assumption that mere regulation by public service commissions is, in itself, a sure guarantee of protection of the interests of the consumer.

The questionable taking of jurisdiction by Federal courts, the gradual erection of a body of court made law, the astuteness of our legal brethren, the possible temporary capitulation of our public servants and even of a dormant public opinion itself, may, in the future, as in the past, nullify the rights of the public.

I, as your Governor, will insist, and I, trust with the support of the whole people, that there be no alienation of our possession of and title to our power sites, and that whatever method of distribution be adopted there can be no possible legal thwarting of the protection of the people themselves from excessive profits on the part of anybody.

On another matter I tread perhaps a new path. The phrase, "rich man's justice," has become too common nowadays. So complicated has our whole legal machinery become through our attempt to mend antiquated substructures by constant patching of the legal procedure and the courts that justice is our most expensive commodity. That rich criminals too often escape punishment is a general belief of our people. The difficulty with which our citizens maintain their civil rights before the courts has not been made a matter of such public notice but is equally serious. It is my hope that within the next two years we will have begun to simplify and to cheapen justice for the people.

Lastly, I want to refer to the difficult situation to which in recent years a large part of the rural population of our state has come. With few exceptions it has not shared in the prosperity of the urban centers.

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It is not enough to dismiss this problem with the generality that it is the result of changing economic conditions. It is time to take practical steps to relieve our farm population of unequal tax burdens, to install economies in the methods of local government, to devise sounder marketing, to stabilize what has been too much a speculative industry; and, finally, to encourage the use of each acre of our state for the purpose to which it is by nature most suited. I am certain that the cities will cooperate to this end, and that, more and more, we as citizens shall become state-minded.

May I, as your newly elected Governor, appeal for your help, for your advice, and, when you feel it is needed, for your criticism? No man may be a successful Governor without the full assistance of the people of his own commonwealth.

Were I as wise as Solomon, all that I might propose or decide would be mere wasted effort, unless I have your constant support. On many of the great state questions that confront us, the platforms and the public pledges of candidates of both parties are substantially agreed. We have passed through a struggle against old-time political ideas, against antiquated conservatism, against ignorance of modern conditions, marked by serious disagreements between the Legislative and the Executive branches of the government. As I read the declarations of both parties in asking the support of the people at the polls, I can see little reason for further controversies of this kind.

There is a period in our history known in all our school books as the "Era of Good Feeling." It is my hope that we stand on the threshold of another such era in this state. For my part, I pledge that the business of the state will not be allowed to become involved in partisan politics and that I will not attempt to claim unfair advantage for my party or for myself, for the accomplishing of those things on which we are all agreed.

You have honored me greatly by selecting me as your Chief Executive. It is my hope that I will not fail you in this critical period of our history. I wish that you may have a continuance of good government and the happiest of New Years.

