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SPEECH

by

THE HONORABLE HOMER S. CUMMINGS  
C. C.  
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT A DINNER GIVEN IN HIS HONOR

at

THE STRATFIELD HOTEL, BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT,

April 15, 1933, at 8 P. M.

Mr. Cummings spoke, in part as follows:

In this very room, eight years ago, I attended a banquet given to me by the Bar of Fairfield County upon my retirement from the office of State's Attorney. That event marked the termination of a decade of service which was of incalculable benefit to me, and which, I hope was of some value to the State. The intervening years have swept by like a tide and now I greet another company of friends who, from over-flowing hearts, bid me God-speed. I am quite unable to make adequate acknowledgment of the beautiful and gracious speeches which have been delivered here tonight. Like Hamlet "I am even poor in thanks". I wish I could make you know how deeply I am touched by this evidence of your generous spirit toward me. There is a well beloved poet who speaks of "Lethe and Eunoë" - the remembered dream and the forgotten sorrow". Some day, perhaps when I am very old, I shall think of these lines again as I recall the moving events of tonight.

✓ It was a witty Irishman (and I am reliably informed that all Irishmen are witty) who said that the greatest objection to one's obituary was that one had to die to read it. However, I have lived to hear mine which most people would regard as a much more exhilarating experience. Of course, it is an open secret (and, I may add, more open than secret) that my original destination was the Philippine Islands. ✓ Their people, their struggles, their progress, their problems and their relationship to our country and to the rest of the world, have been to me, for many years, a fascinating study. I looked forward to my prospective experience there with a keen sense of pleasurable anticipation. However, fate, in tragic fashion, intervened and it is my lot to carry on in the post of Attorney General which, under other circumstances, would have been filled by one of America's greatest sons. The untimely death of Senator Walsh of Montana amounted to a national tragedy. He was my friend of twenty years standing. As I pause with reverence to pay tribute to his memory, I can think of nothing more appropriate to say than that I shall strive to the utmost of my ability to carry forward the unfinished task in his devoted spirit.

The Attorney General of the United States, it has frequently been remarked, is at the head of the greatest law office in the world. For the fiscal year ending June thirty next, it will have cost our people about forty million dollars to have maintained the Department of Justice. Each of its twelve leading sub-divisions is as large, even as important, as the whole Attorney General's office was a generation ago. About nine thousand employees and officials fall within its direct supervision. It is a complicated mechanism dealing with questions affecting hundreds of millions of dollars and the most sacred of human rights. It touches, in intimate

fashion and in unnumbered ways, the lives, the welfare, the security and the business activities of our people. Its functions have never been more important or more vital than they are today. To the last ounce of my energy, I shall endeavor to make that great agency of Government serve the people of America, who support it and trust it and rely upon it. To my mind the law is not a mere body of precedents. ✓ I visualize it <sup>(law)</sup> as a living, vital, growing thing, fashioned for service and constantly being refashioned for further service. It is not, and it should not be, the unloved ruler of a reluctant people. It is, and it should be, a trusted servant ministering to the needs of mankind. It should serve to cement, and not to strain, the bonds of affection that ought to exist between the people and the government they have erected. ✓ There are many things to be done. A new life can be breathed into the Department of Justice, just as it can be breathed into that living organism which is sometimes aloofly described as "the national machinery of government".

For years our people have been upon a long bitter trek, with its wastage of life and treasure - a downward, disheartened, bewildered retreat toward lower levels of civilization and to the very verge of economic and financial disaster. What man of vision, or understanding, or human sympathy, could have witnessed this prolonged retrogression without profound sorrow and acute apprehension? The frantic and, for the most part, futile attempt to adjust debts, in the face of constantly falling price levels, has taken its toll upon every hand. No one has escaped. Values have disappeared; taxes lie like a dead hand upon enterprise; municipal, state and national budgets are out of balance; the savings of years have vanished; industry is prostrated; millions are unemployed; the farming population has been

reduced to penury; the nations of the world have retired into the water-tight compartments of a narrow nationalism; commerce no longer puts to sea; and fear and animosity have taken the place of common good-will and common sense.

Under these disheartening circumstances many people have frankly despaired of our civilization and maintain that it is not merely upon trial but that it has failed. Others, pointing to the swift and even fundamental changes that have overtaken other peoples in other parts of the world, have freely predicted the break-up of the foundations of our government. These fears I do not for a moment share. Nor do I believe that they are entertained by any substantial portion of our people. Such apprehensions have no legitimate place in our national psychology. As I look about I see no swift and disturbing governmental changes amongst peoples long habituated to self-rule under democratic forms. A long established democracy is the most stable of governments. Its very structure admits of necessary adjustments in times of stress. As for ourselves, the heritage of liberalism stands us in good stead. Those who founded our government, and gave their lives for it, have not been forgotten. America is made of stout stuff and our democracy runs too far back into the history of the struggle for liberty to succumb merely because our governmental machinery is out of adjustment. We do not discard the automobile because the carburetor fails to work; we proceed to adjust the carburetor.

A program of progress is already unfolding before you. It has passed the period of promise and entered the stage of fulfillment. Moreover it is being developed under a leadership so inspiring that, schooled as I am in the disappointing business of politics, I feel my pulses stir

and my heart leap again at the sight of America emerging from her dark dream. This is no time to assess responsibility for our present troubles in terms of narrow partisanship. This is a period of national emergency that engages the faith and service of every man, woman, and child in America. The spiritual resources of the nation must be mobilized and the hidden reservoirs of abundance drawn upon. The artificial restraints that have dammed back the flow of prosperity must be released once more; that which was unplanned or selfishly guided must take its place in an orderly governmental process and a great cleansing and rebuilding program must go forward to its conclusion. Those who have considered it legitimate to gamble with other people's money must abdicate their leadership, and those who have thought that the center of government was located in the financial district must learn that its proper seat is at Washington. If I mistake not, the people of America, without respect to partisanship or previous party affiliation, welcome this wholesome process with glad hearts. We, who assemble here tonight, are not partisans. I repudiate any such narrow or debasing definition. We are fellow Americans who love our country and believe in her institutions. Her afflictions have been our common sorrow, and we are proud to serve in any way that may be given to us in order that America shall be herself again.

I am sure that I shall hear no dissenting voice when I quote the prophetic words spoken on the steps of the Capitol on the fourth day of March, by President Roosevelt when he said "This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper". There, let us pause!

If I have spoken with feeling, it is because I know that your friendship will make you understand what is in my heart. I am happy to have your good will and your confidence. In very truth, you have placed a staff in my hands, which will serve me well in the days to come. From the depths of my heart I thank you all and bid you goodnight.