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ADDRESS OF

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS

J. C.,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Delivered at

Moose Hall

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Thursday, October 29, 1936,

8:15 P. M.

(hour subject to possible change)

Broadcast over Station WGAL  
and a State-wide hook-up.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

To address the citizens of Lancaster, and simultaneously to speak over the radio to the people of Pennsylvania, is to participate in the national campaign at one of its most interesting and crucial points. Nothing more significant in American politics has taken place than the political realignments in this State.

Not so many years ago any suggestion that Pennsylvania might by any chance elect Democratic officials, or, in a national campaign, support a Democratic candidate for the Presidency, would have been greeted with derision. Now it is an accepted fact. Is it not worthwhile to pause for a moment to inquire as to the causes of this shift in public sentiment?

Pennsylvania, in a real sense, is an epitome of the nation. You have here rich mines and other natural resources, a population representing almost every national antecedent, congested industrial centers, stately cities and a magnificent sweep of fertile hills and valleys where a sturdy agricultural population has had its abode for more than 200 years. Here, too, are the great traditions of religious and political freedom, dating back to the days when William Penn entered into his friendly compact with the Indians.

Before the Civil War, there was a period when Pennsylvania had a Democratic history. Following that great conflict it went along with the party of Lincoln and retained that allegiance for decades thereafter. But change is the order of life. Old things give way to new. That which is outworn, or unfit for modern needs, yields to something better. I do not have to tell you of the grip which a Republican machine secured upon this

state and the evils which grew up under its unbridled and unquestioned power.

The type of control to which I refer was not only characteristic of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, but it became manifest in Republican National leadership as well. The difficulty with the Republican party was that after long years of political mastery it had attracted to itself powerful, predatory interests bent chiefly upon securing greater and greater privileges without thought of the welfare of others. An intolerable situation was created, both in this State and in the Nation.

The forces to which I refer not only distorted the economic structure of our country, but began to beat down individual enterprise until liberty of action existed more in name than in fact. These same seekers of privilege, by virtue of heavy contributions to the party in power, obtained a strangle grip upon its organization, overawed its leaders, and formulated policies suitable to their own purposes. It is not strange that the Nation has changed; and it is not strange that Pennsylvania is changing with it.

The conditions I have described in due course produced their inevitable result.

The distress of our agricultural population became so acute that it presented a national problem of immediate consequence as early as the Harding Administration. The Republican Party at that time promised to aid the farmer, but his condition grew worse. The promise was renewed by the next Republican Administration, but the distress of the farming population became even more alarming. One of the pledges upon which Mr. Hoover was elected was that prompt relief would be afforded to agriculture. Not only

did the Republican Party fail to provide this relief, but during Mr. Hoover's Administration farmers were being dispossessed from their homes at the rate of 200,000 a year; and during the latter months of his Administration it ran as high as 1,000 a day.

I ask you to pause for a moment and visualize the picture of a great army of 200,000 of the best and sturdiest citizens of our country being driven from their own land as a result of conditions which they had neither brought about nor could control.

In the meantime a great banking and speculative orgy was going on, stimulated, I regret to say, by encouraging statements issued from the White House. We were living in a fool's paradise and finally, for the reasons I have mentioned and for many others which it is not necessary here to enumerate, the whole structure fell in ruins. At that time Mr. Mellon was Secretary of the Treasury and in financial circles it was deemed but moderate praise to describe him as "the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton".

In the minds of many people who were victims of "the Mellon complex" there had been a feeling that his mere presence in the Cabinet was an assurance of prosperity.

On the first of January, 1930, Mr. Mellon issued a statement saying "I see nothing in the present situation that is either menacing or warrants pessimism. \*\*\* I have every confidence that there will be a revival of activity in the spring."

On the eighth of March, 1930, Mr. Hoover predicted that unemployment would be at an end in "sixty days", and, on the second of May of that year, in a long address he said "we have been passing through one of those great economic storms which periodically bring hardship and suffering on our

people. While the crisis took place only six months ago, I am convinced we have now passed the worst." These were the days when prosperity was "just around the corner".

I mention these instances to indicate how little the Hoover Administration realized either the character or the extent of the disaster that had come upon us.

During the Hoover Administration 6,067 banks were forced to close their doors. The managers of financial institutions that still survived were selling securities with feverish activity, foreclosing mortgages, and restricting credit. Foreign trade had been brought to a standstill. International finance was completely disorganized. Price levels were falling. Industries were closing. Failures and bankruptcies were reaching enormous and, indeed, unparalleled proportions. The morale of our people had been shaken and there were repeated outbursts of violence in large sections of our country, previously known as amongst the most orderly and dependable in our nation. That, in brief, was the situation bequeathed by the outgoing administration to the incoming President.

How President Roosevelt met this situation is familiar history.

Business is on the upgrade everywhere. I do not ask you to take my word for it. I merely ask that you look about you and, if you wish confirmation, read the recent report of the United States Chamber of Commerce, an organization distinctly critical of the present Administration, which discloses an increase in employment of 7,000,000, and other advances all along the line.

Prosperity is no longer a myth. It is no longer "just around the corner". It is here.

Governor Landon in a speech made at Cleveland on the 12th day of this month, took occasion to criticize the Department of Justice for its activity in connection with the attempt of the Pennsylvania State Senate, through a sub-committee, to investigate the Works Progress Administration. Such an attempt was in fact made. It was purely a political device designed for partisan purposes. The Department of Justice did not object to it on that ground, however. The difficulty was that it constituted an attempt by a State government to interfere with the affairs of the national government. The purported authority of the Committee was such that it had power to summon witnesses, subpoena documents, and delve into the details of Federal affairs. Naturally this was a process vicious in fact and unwarranted in principle. The Department of Justice, through its representatives, applied to the Courts for an injunction.

After a full hearing a Republican Judge granted the injunction and wrote a well-considered opinion sustaining the contentions of the government. Manifestly it was just as outrageous for a State government to attempt to investigate the National government as it would be for the National government to attempt to investigate the affairs of a State government. The Court acted fairly and sensibly.

Nevertheless, Governor Landon in his speech refers to this attempted interference as "a highly proper investigation," and criticizes the Department of Justice for following a course that the Court approved. And then he adds, referring to the whole episode "this is an incredible thing in free America". I suggest that it would have been "incredible" in free America if any other course had been followed by the Department of Justice. Moreover, it is "an incredible thing" that Governor Landon, after

all his protestations of respect for the Courts and his earnest plea that "the American Way" be followed, should so far forget himself as to speak favorably of a partisan attempt so clearly unwarranted, both in law and in sound principles of government.

The selection of a President is a serious business. The burden of proof is on those who would convince the American people that a change of Government would be to their advantage. Nebulous ideas, undisclosed programs, and a mere longing for office are not sufficient guarantees to justify the great experiment of a change of administration when the country is on the upgrade and increasing prosperity is visible on every hand.

Governor Landon talks earnestly about the evils of waste, but does not tell us where to save. He talks about high taxes, but does not tell us where to cut. He talks about "the American Way", but does not describe it so that we can tell whether it is the Hoover Way, the Harding Way, the Hearst Way, the Mellon Way, or what way.

Boondoggling, they say, must cease, but what particular boondoggling and where? Always it is in some other county, or in some other State. Always it is far away and never near at hand. Waste, they say, must cease. What waste and where? Always it is the next county, or the next State, but never under your immediate eyes.

After all, what does this talk about waste amount to? Governor Landon did not seem to entertain any such ideas a little while back. Speaking in 1933, at Baltimore, he said "I desire to express in a tangible way the appreciation of the people of Kansas for the courage with which President Roosevelt has attacked the depression." In 1934, he said, "Well, if the Democrats won't stand up for the relief program and its administra-

tion, I will do it for them. I say that, considering the problems they have met, they have done a good job and I am glad to have cooperated with them." His present attitude with reference to relief is evidently the by-product of political exigency.

It is said that his own written request for relief in Kansas exceeded by twelve million dollars the actual amount spent there. Nor do I think the people are disturbed about the cry of excessive taxation. As between having an income with which to pay taxes and being so stony broke that you can pay no taxes at all, very few people would have any difficulty in making a choice. The real test of the burden of taxation is not the amount you pay in taxes, but the amount that remains after you have paid them.

And let me add that the charges of "waste" lodged against this administration are totally unwarranted. Our program is to stop waste and conserve the assets of the country. We are dealing with the conservation of soil, forests, water power, human resources, human life, human hopes. We are concerned with the preservation of our industries, our farms, our factories, our mines, our financial system. It is a national program directed against soil erosion, forest devastation by fire, water power draining idly to the sea, depleted streams, diminishing water levels, threatening drought, oncoming floods, devastating price levels, depleted incomes; against robbery through the sale of worthless securities; against unemployment; against disease; against crime. It is not a program of waste or reckless expenditure. It is a great saving program.

The administration is making a permanent investment for the welfare of generations yet to come. To spend, to invest and to conserve do not constitute waste. The billions of private income put into corporate treasuries for private profits are not described by financial experts as a "spending

orgy", but as the foundation of prosperity. It is only when the government, the sovereign people united under the American flag, employ the credit of the nation and its workers to found a national program of conservation and recovery for the present good and the permanent welfare of the people as a whole, that we hear the cry at the wailing wall of corporate greed, "Oh, the waste, oh, the spending orgy."

If an individual comes into possession of a run-down and decaying business and borrows five or ten thousand dollars with which to build it up and make it thrive, it is considered good management and he is thought to be a wise man. If the directors of a corporation find the company in distress, with machinery obsolete, buildings run down, business disorganized and stagnant, and thereupon issue bonds to revitalize it and to convert a decadent institution into a going concern, they are undoubtedly faithful officials, smart men, and wise administrators.

Were the investments at Boulder Dam waste? Were the investments in the Tennessee Valley Authority waste? Was it waste to save the forests, dam the streams, hold back the floods? The difficulty with these short-sighted critics is that they are unable to visualize either the America that is or the America that is to be.

The achievements of President Roosevelt stand like a great rock in a weary land. The works of mercy and rehabilitation have gone forward with swiftness and honest purpose. The broken life of America has been restored and hope has re-entered the homes of our people.

Let us support our President who has served so well in a difficult hour, and whose great leadership is needed along the upward path upon which America has again set her feet.