

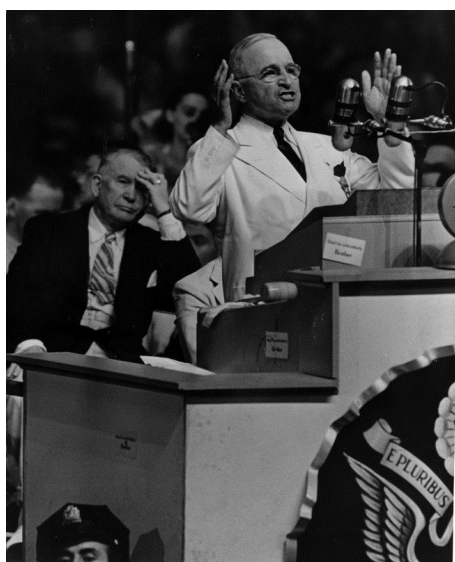


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Harry S. Truman

Democratic National Convention Acceptance Address

delivered 15 July 1948, Philadelphia, PA



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Thank you. Thank you very much.

[Audience members: Crosstalk... "Lower the microphones."]

I can't. I have to have them up where I can see. I'm sorry that the microphones are in your way, but they have to be where they are because I've got to be able to see what I'm doing -- as I always am able to see what I am doing.

I can't tell you how very much I appreciate the honor which you just conferred upon me. I shall continue to try to deserve it.

I accept the nomination.



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And I want to thank this convention for its unanimous nomination of my good friend and colleague, Senator Barkley of Kentucky. He's a great man, and a great public servant. Senator Barkley and I will win this election and make these Republicans like it -- don't you forget that. We'll do that because they are wrong and we are right, and I'll prove it to you in just a few minutes.

This convention met to express the will and reaffirm the beliefs of the Democratic Party. There have been differences of opinion, and that's the democratic way. Those differences have been settled by a majority vote, as they should be. Now it's time for us to get together and beat the common enemy -- and that's up to you.

We have been working together for victory in a great cause. Victory has become a habit of our Party. It's been elected four times in succession, and I'm convinced it will be elected a fifth time next November. The reason is that the people know that the Democratic Party is the people's party, and the Republican Party is the Party of special interest, and it always has been and always will be.

The record of the Democratic Party is written in the accomplishments of the last 16 years. I don't need to repeat them. They have been very ably placed before this convention by the keynote speaker, the candidate for Vice President, and by the permanent Chairman.

Confidence and security have been brought to the American people by the Democratic Party. Farm income has increased from less than 2 1/2 billion dollars in 1933 to more than 18 billion dollars in 1947. Never in the world were the farmers of any republic or any kingdom or any other country as prosperous as the farmers of the United States; and if they don't do their duty by the Democratic Party, they're the most ungrateful people in the world. Wages and salaries in this country have increased from 29 billion dollars in 1933 to more than 128 billion dollars in 1947. That's labor, and labor never had but one friend in politics, and that was the Democratic Party and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

And I'll say to labor just what I have said to the farmers; they are the most ungrateful people in the world if they pass the Democratic Party by this year. The total national income has increased from less than 40 billion dollars in 1933 to 203 billion dollars in 1947, the greatest in all the history of the world. These benefits have been spread to all the people, because it's the business of the Democratic Party to see that the people get a fair share of these things.



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This last, worst 80th Congress proved just the opposite for the Republicans.

The record on foreign policy of the Democratic Party is that the United States has been turned away permanently from isolationism, and we've converted the greatest and best of the Republicans to our viewpoint on that subject.

The United States has to accept its full responsibility for leadership in international affairs. We have been the backers and the -- the people who organized and started the United Nations, first started under that great Democratic President, Woodrow Wilson, as the League of Nations. The League was sabotaged by the Republicans in 1920. And we must see that the United Nations continues a strong and growing body, so we can have everlasting peace in the world.

We've removed the trade barriers in the world, which is the best asset we can have for peace. Those trade barriers must not be put back into operation again. We have started the foreign aid program, which means the recovery of Europe and China, and the -- and the the Far East. We instituted the program for Greece and Turkey, and I'll say to you that all these things were done in a cooperative, bipartisan manner.

The Foreign Relations Committees of the Senate and House were taken into the full confidence of the President in every one of these moves, and don't let anybody tell you anything else. As I've said time and time again, foreign policy should be the policy of the whole nation and not a -- a policy of one Party or the other. Partisanship should stop at the water's edge; and I shall continue to preach that through this whole campaign.

I'd like to say a word or two now about what I think the Republican philosophy is; and I'll speak from actions and from history and from experience. The situation in 1932 was due to the policies of the Republican Party control of the Government of the United States. The Republican Party, as I said a while ago, favors the privileged few and not the common everyday man. Ever since its inception, that Party has been under the control of special privilege, and they concretely proved it in the 80th Congress. They proved it by the things they did to the people, and not for them. They proved it by the things they failed to do.

Now, let's look at some of them -- just a few.



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Time and time again I recommended the extension of price control before it expired on June 30th, 1946. I asked for that extension in September 1945, in November 1945, in a message on the State of the Union in 1946. That price control legislation didn't come to my desk until June 30th, 1946, on the day on which it was supposed to expire. And I -- it was such a rotten bill that I couldn't sign it. And 30 days after that, they sent me one that was just as bad, and I had to sign it, because they quit and went home.

It was said, when OPA [Office of Price Administration] died, that prices would adjust themselves for the benefit of the country. They have adjusted themselves alright. They've gone all the way off the chart in adjusting themselves, at the expense of the consumer and for the benefit of the people that hold the goods. I called a special session of Congress in November 1947 -- November the 17th, 1947 -- and I sat out -- set out a 10-point program for the welfare and benefit of this country, among other things standby price controls. I got nothing. Congress has still done nothing.

Way back four and a half years ago, while I was in the Senate, we passed a housing bill in the Senate known as the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill. It was a bill to clear the slums in the big cities and to help erect low-rent housing. That bill, as I said, passed the Senate four years ago. It died in the House. That bill was reintroduced in the 80th Congress as the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill. The name was slightly changed, but it was practically the same bill. And it passed the Senate but was allowed to die in the House of Representatives. The Banking and Currency Committee sat on that bill. It was finally forced out of the Committee, and the Rules Committee took charge, and it still [is] in the Rules Committee. But desperate pleas from Philadelphia in that convention that met here three weeks ago couldn't get that housing bill passed. They passed a bill they called a housing bill, which isn't worth the paper it's written on.

In the field of labor we needed moderate legislation to promote labor-management harmony, but Congress instead passed that so-called Taft-Hartley Act, which has disrupted labor-management relations and will cause strife and bitterness for years to come if it's not repealed, and the Democratic platform says it ought to be repealed. I tried to strengthen the Labor Department. The Republican platform of 1944 said if they were in power, they'd build up a strong Labor Department. You know what they've done to the Labor Department? They've simply torn it up. There's only one bureau left that's functioning, and they cut the appropriation on that so it can't hardly function. I recommended an increase in the minimum wage. What did I get? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.



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I suggested that the schools in this country are crowded, teachers underpaid, and that there a shortage of teachers. One of the greatest national needs: more and better schools. I urged the Congress to provide 300 million dollars to aid the States in meeting the present educational crisis. Congress did nothing about it. Time and again I have recommended improvements in social security law, including extending protection to those not now covered; increase the amounts of the benefits, reduce the eligibility age of women from 65 to 60 years. Congress studied the matter for two years, but couldn't find time to extend or increase benefits. But it did find time to take social security benefits away from 750,000 people, and they passed that over my veto.

I have repeatedly asked the Congress to pass a health program. The nation suffers from lack of medical care. That situation can be remedied any time the Congress wants to act upon it.

Everybody knows that I recommended to the Congress the civil rights program. I did so because I believed it to be my duty under the Constitution. Some of the members of my own Party disagree with me violently on this matter. But they stand up and do it openly. People can tell where they stand. But the Republicans all professed to be for these measures. But they -- Congress -- failed to act. They had enough men to do it, and they could have had cloture. They didn't have to have a filibuster. They were enough people in that Congress that would vote for cloture.

Now everybody likes to have low taxes, but we must reduce the national debt in times of prosperity. And when tax relief can be given, it ought to go to those who need it most, and not go to those who need it least, as this Republican rich man's tax bill did when they passed it over my veto on the third try. The first one of these tax bills they sent me was so rotten that they couldn't even stomach it themselves. They finally did send one that was somewhat improved, but it still helps the rich and sticks the knife into the back of the poor.

Now the Republicans came here a few weeks ago, and they wrote up a platform. I hope you've all read that platform. They adopted a platform, and that platform had a lot of promises and statements of what the Republican Party is for, and what they would do if they were in power. They promised to do in that platform a lot of things I've been asking them to do -- and that they've refused to do when they had the power. The Republican platform cries about cruelly high prices. I have been trying to get them to do something about high prices ever since they met the first time.



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Now listen to this one. This one's equally as bad, and as cynical. The Republican platform comes out for slum clearance and low-rental housing. I've been trying to get them to pass that housing bill ever since they met the first time, and it's still resting in the Rules Committee, that bill is.

The Republican platform favors equality of educational opportunity and the promotion of education. I've been trying to get Congress to do something about that ever since they came there, and that bill is at rest in the House of Representatives.

The Republican platform urges extending and increasing social security benefits. Think of that. Increasing social security benefits. And yet when they had the opportunity, they took 750,000 people off the social security rolls. I wonder if they think they can fool the people of the United States with such poppycock as that.

There's a long list of these promises in that Republican platform. If it weren't so late, I'd tell you about all of them. I have discussed a number of these failures of the Republican 80th Congress, and every one of them is important. Two of them are of major concern to nearly every American family: they failure to do anything about high prices and the failure to do anything about housing. My duty as President requires that I use every means within my power to get the laws the people need on matters of such importance and urgency.

I am therefore calling this Congress back into session on the 26th of July!

On the 26th day of July, which out in Missouri we call "Turnip Day," I'm going to call that Congress back and I'm going to ask them to pass laws halting rising prices, and to meet the housing crisis -- which they say they're for in their platform.

At the same time I shall ask them to act upon other vitally needed measures such as aid to education, which they say they're for; a national health program; civil rights legislation, which they say they're for; an increase in the minimum wage, which I doubt very much they're for; an extension of social security coverage and increased benefits, which they say they're for; funds for projects needed in our program to provide public power and cheap electricity. By indirection, this 80th Congress has tried to sabotage the power policy which the United States has pursued for 14 years. That power lobby is just as bad as the real estate lobby, which is sitting on the housing bill.



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I shall ask for adequate and decent law for displaced persons in place of this anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic law which this 80th Congress passed.

Now, my friends, if there's any reality behind that Republican platform, we ought to get some action out of the short session of the 80th Congress. They could do this job in 15 days, if they want to do it. And they'll still have time to go out and run for office. They are going to try to dodge their responsibility. They are going to drag all the red herrings they can across this campaign, but I'm here to say to you that Senator Barkley and I are not going to let them get away with it.

Now, what that worst 80th Congress does in this special session will be the test. The American people will not decide by listening to mere words, or by reading a mere platform. They'll decide on the record, the record as it has been written. And in the record is the stark truth that the battle lines of 1948 are the same as they were back in 1932, when the nation lay prostrate and helpless as a result of Republican misrule and inaction.

In 1932, we were attacking the citadel of special privilege and greed. We were fighting to drive the money changers from the temple. Today, in 1948, we are now the defenders of the stronghold of democracy and of equal opportunity, the haven of the ordinary people of this land and not of the favored classes or the powerful few. The battle cry is just the same now as it was in 1932, and I paraphrase the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt as he issued the challenge in accepting his nomination in Chicago: This is more than a political call to arms. Give me your help, not to win votes alone, but to win in this new crusade and keep America secure and safe for its own people.

Now my friends, with the help of God and the wholehearted push which you can put behind this campaign, we can save this country from a continuation of the 80th Congress, and from misrule from now on.

I must have your help. You must get in and push, and win this election. The country can't afford another Republican Congress.