



John F. Kennedy

Inaugural Anniversary Dinner Address



Delivered 20 January 1962

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Mr. Rosenbloom and Mrs. Freeman, Mr. Bailey and Mr. McCloskey, Mr. Speaker:

I first of all want to express, I know, on behalf of all of us, our great appreciation to Miss Clooney, Miss Remick, and Danny Thomas for coming from a far distance to help us tonight. I wish we could all just applaud them.

I want to also express my appreciation to President Truman. I must say it is nice to have a former President who speaks well of you, and we're glad to have him here tonight. His only request has been, since I've been President, to get his piano up from the cellar, and we've done that -- and we're going to run on it.

And I also want to express my appreciation, and the appreciation of us all, to the Vice President for his tribute to Speaker Rayburn. I must say that the merger of Boston and Austin, as he said today, was really the last merger that the Attorney General has allowed, but it's been one of the most successful. And as a loyal and faithful friend, I think we've worked together better than any President and Vice Presidential team in history, at least since Roosevelt and Truman.



I spoke a year ago today, to take the Inaugural, and I'd like to paraphrase a couple of statements I made that day by saying that we observe tonight not a celebration of freedom but a victory of Party, for we have sworn to pay off the same Party debt our forebears ran up nearly a year and three months ago. Our deficit will not be paid off in the next hundred days, nor will it be paid off in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor perhaps even in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin -- remembering that generosity is not a sign of weakness and that Ambassadors are always subject to Senate confirmation, for if the Democratic Party cannot be helped by the many who are poor, it cannot be saved by the few who are rich. So let us begin.

I want to express our thanks to all of you for helping. What we are attempting to do tonight is to lay the groundwork for the Congressional campaigns of 1962, and we realize, I think, all the Members of the House and Senate, that history is not with us, that in this century only in 1934, during the periods of the great pre-eminence of the Democratic Party did the Party in power ever win seats, let alone hold its own. But we believe in 1962 that the Democratic Party, both at home and abroad, is best fitted to lead this country -- and therefore we start tonight on the campaigns of 1962.

This is -- though we like to think of ourselves as a young country -- this is the oldest republic in the world. When the United States was founded there was a King in France, and a Czar in Russia, and an Emperor in Peking. They have all been wiped away, but the United States has still survived.

We are also members of the oldest political Party on earth, and it is a source of satisfaction to me that when we attempt, in this Administration, to rebuild our ties with Latin America, to strengthen our Alliance for Progress, we trod in the same steps that Franklin Roosevelt trod in, nearly 25 or 30 years ago.

And when we attempt this year to build more closely the Atlantic Community, we trod in the same steps that President Truman trod in, nearly 14 years ago, when he developed the Marshall plan and NATO.

And when we stand with the United Nations against the desires of those who make themselves our adversaries, and even our friends, we stand where Woodrow Wilson stood nearly 50 years ago.

And when we make a great national effort, to make sure that free men are not second in space, we move in the same direction that Thomas Jefferson moved in when he sent Lewis and Clark to the far reaches of this country during his term of office.

I am proud to be a Democrat, and in my opinion, in November of 1962, any Member of the House, the Senate, the State Legislature and the Governor can stand with pride on the record of the Democratic Party.



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To govern is to choose, and the people of the United States, I believe in this vital year, when we are faced with the greatest hazards that we have faced in our long history, should be faced with a choice. I do not believe there is room in the United States for two parties who believe in lying at anchor.

The role of the Democratic Party, the reason it has outlived the Federal Party, the Whig Party, and now holds responsibility in the executive branch and the House and the Senate, after this long history, has been because it has believed in moving out, in moving ahead, in starting on new areas, and bringing new programs here and abroad.

That's the function of our Party. We have no other function. And I believe in 1962 the Democratic Party should run as it has run in the past, as a progressive Party, ready to defend its record, ready to recognize that in a changing and vital world that our Party must move with it.

So we come tonight in the beginning of a long campaign, and we ask your help, because what we start tonight, we believe can be finished in November, and I believe that the interests of this country will be served by our Party as it has on so many vital occasions in the past -- and the fire from our effort can light the world.

Thank you.