

The Delray Democrat

#SecondBillofRights¹

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his penultimate State of the Union address on January 11, 1944. No man did more for America and Americans in the Twentieth Century, leading our nation to victory over the twin scourges of the Great Depression and the forces of fascism.

He was too ill that evening to go to Capitol Hill, so he sent a transcript to Congress and read the text over the radio, another in a long line of the “Fireside Chats” cherished by Americans in those dark days. When he was finished, however, he invited the media into the White House to film part of the speech.

In a section of his message that he selected to have filmed, copied below, he argued that we cannot be content “if some fraction of our people – whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth – is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.”

He then proposed a Second Bill of Rights, explaining that the original had guaranteed “life and liberty” but that failed to provide equality in “the pursuit of happiness.” A little over a year later he died, and his dream died with him. It is high time, and it is our duty, to resurrect it. #SecondBillofRights. Tweet it. Work for it. Demand it.

FDR’s Second Bill of Rights

It is our duty now to begin to lay the plans and determine the strategy for the winning of a lasting peace and the establishment of an American standard of living higher than ever before known. We cannot be content, no matter how high that general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people—whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth—is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.

This Republic had its beginning, and grew to its present strength, under the protection of certain inalienable political rights—among them the right of free speech, free press, free worship, trial by jury, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. They were our rights to life and liberty.

As our Nation has grown in size and stature, however—as our industrial economy expanded—these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness.

We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. “Necessitous men are not free men.” People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, January 2021, p. 5.

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed. Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the Nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being.

America's own rightful place in the world depends in large part upon how fully these and similar rights have been carried into practice for our citizens. For unless there is security here at home there cannot be lasting peace in the world.