

SPEECH BY SENATOR LYNDON B. JOHNSON OF TEXAS
PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION MEETING
DALLAS, TEXAS

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My Friends and Fellow Texans:

It has been said that the strength of a nation can be no greater than the self-reliance of its individual citizens. By that standard, we are truly a country that need not fear the future.

This is a land built upon the sturdy bedrock of human initiative and human independence. Our ancestors dared the barren wilderness and the uncharted plain. They braved the forests and the prairies.

They conquered a continent -- in search of freedom and independence.

Their way of life was simple. They worked hard; feared God; and paid their debts. Upon that simple creed, they founded a nation that is the hope of the world. That nation is our heritage.

In recent years, it has become popular in some quarters to say that we are not worthy of that heritage. There are those who -- for reasons of their own -- are trying to tell our people that they are soft -- that they have become dependent upon charity from above.

Our meeting today is one that gives the lie to these peddlers of defeat. Our meeting today is the symbol of American independence, sturdy and flourishing despite its detractors.

We are here to mark an outstanding achievement of more than 300 Texas farm families. We are here to record for the nation the fact that those families have paid their farm tenant loans under the Bankhead-Jones act at least 30 years before they were due.

I have been looking forward eagerly to this event. I have been anticipating it with pleasure because it represents vindication -- vindication of the faith of the American people in themselves.

The Bankhead-Jones act is one of the great pieces of legislation of the past 20 years. This law -- sponsored by my good friend and distinguished fellow Texan, Judge Marvin Jones, of Amarillo -- ranks with the bills that created REA and the Production and Marketing Administration.

These are the measures which did so much to reestablish agriculture after the depression of the late twenties and early thirties. These are the measures which once again have made farming a way of life attractive to Americans.

But the essential wisdom of these acts can be measured only in part by the economic benefits they have brought to our people. It is of far greater importance to our future that they represent help without charity; assistance that does not compel dependence.

The Bankhead-Jones act helps Americans to help themselves. They have proven themselves worthy of that help.

I can well recall the days in Congress when those of us who had faith in the American people were fighting for this legislation. We met the scoffers and the doubters and those who were faint of heart.

They said the American farmer would not repay his loans.

They said the American farmer would not buy electricity.

They said the American farmer would not practice soil conservation -- even though it was for his own good.

The passing of the years have given the answer in full. The American farmer is repaying his loans; he is buying and using electricity; he is practicing the soil conservation that pays such rich dividends in present and future productivity.

But the scoffers and the doubters are still with us. They will not concede the progress of the past twenty years. They will not admit the achievements of the American people because they have nothing to offer the American people except doubt and despair.

I will not attempt to apologize for the progress of the past twenty years. The record of achievement is clear. The American people need not apologize for that which they have done for themselves.

Through the Bankhead-Jones Act, more than 225 million dollars has been loaned to farm families in Texas. These loans are being repaid -- on time.

Through the REA, nearly nine out of every ten Texas farm homes have light and electricity. I can recall the day -- it was only 20 years ago -- when only one out of every ten farm families were so fortunate. Now we are taking another step through REA -- rural telephone service.

Through the County Committees of the Production and Marketing Administration, the farmer himself has a voice in his own economic destiny.

Through the Commodity Credit Corporation our farmers now find supports for their prices.

Through the cooperation of the Soil Conservation Service more than 2,000 soil conservation districts have been organized, covering more than four million, six hundred thousand farms.

Through the Farm Credit Administration, the Federal Land Banks and other organizations, our farmers can now get credit at reasonable interest rates, compared to the 8 to 10 per cent they paid 20 years ago.

Through the Commodity Exchange Authority, our farmers now have a powerful weapon against rigged markets and price manipulation.

These are the accomplishments of the past 20 years. This is but a small part of what the American people have done for themselves through cooperation without regimentation.

There was a time in the not-too-distant past when the farmer was the forgotten stepchild of America. He not only faced the natural hazards of farming -- weather, blight and insect pests -- but he was at the mercy of markets over which he had no control.

For his credit, he was dependent upon a banking system which had little ceiling on interest rates other than the banker's conscience. As one whose daddy farmed through some of the worst depressions in history, I can assure you that conscience was pretty thin.

For his light and power, he was dependent upon wind and kerosene. His only alternative was to go deeply into debt buying electricity at rates that no normal farmer could afford.

For his transportation, he was dependent upon rate systems that favored the speculators of the East and discriminated against the ranchers and farmers of the South and the West. That is a battle which we are still fighting.

For his markets, he was dependent upon financiers hundreds and even thousands of miles away who bought and sold and hedged with no consideration other than their own profit.

When the farmer bought, he bought high. But when he sold, he sold low. He had no choice.

This was a situation that suited some economic groups in our society very well. By keeping the farmer at the lower end of the economic scale, they were able to create a false appearance of prosperity in the big cities of the North.

It was a prosperity as deceiving as the rosy flush on the cheeks of a malaria-ridden patient.

In 1928 -- at the height of the so-called "prosperous twenties" -- the farm mortgage debt in Texas alone was 646 million dollars. And yet, in that same year, Texas farmers received only 879 million dollars for the crops they harvested.

Contrast that with the Texas farm mortgage debt of 415 million dollars in 1951 and the Texas farm income of two billion, 186 million dollars.

In other words, since 1928 we have cut our farm mortgage debt in Texas by much more than a third and we have increased our cash income by nearly 250 per cent.

It was not an easy job. All of us here know what happened in 1929. All of us can recall the sickening thud that sent our Texas cotton down to $4\frac{1}{2}$ cents a pound; all of us can recall the bankruptcy proceedings and the foreclosures; all of us can recall the four dreary years that cut our national income by more than one-half.

None of us who lived through that period will ever forget the four long, hopeless years waiting for an administration that had sufficient confidence in the American people and the American system to act.

The American people finally found that administration in 1932 -- a year in which the cash income of our Texas farmers reached a low of 318 million dollars. The upturn started immediately and never since that time have we returned to such disastrous levels.

I am recalling these facts to you today not because they are new but because they have assumed a special importance. They are important because the achievements of the past twenty years are now under fire.

Throughout the land has gone up the cry: "It's time for a change!" This call sounds strangely in our ears as we look about us. It comes from very few who wanted a change in 1932.

But it is sounded by every political leader who for the past twenty years has been fighting every step forward taken by the American people.

Look about you and see who are the men who are demanding this "change." You will not find their leaders among your cotton farmers or your grazers.

You will find them among your big manufacturers of the East -- the same men who have fought in Congress after Congress to scuttle the reciprocal trade program. It is on this issue that we can best determine whether those who want a change also want the change to be in our own interests.

We are a State that must export to be strong and prosperous. And yet, for nearly a century our export markets were choked off by Republican high tariff policies. The Republicans claimed that these high tariffs "protected" American industry.

It is true that the tariffs protected the wealthy manufacturers of the East. But they also strangled our export markets for cotton and left us with huge surpluses that we could not sell.

It was not until the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt that the reciprocal trade agreements were instituted and we began to recover our foreign markets. The reciprocal trade agreements are a prime target of those who are so anxious for a "change."

Those who are demanding this "change" do not talk much about the direction they would have us take. They are vague because they have little to offer except a return to 1932.

They are asking us to change the accomplishments of the past 20 years in which our Texas farm income has risen nearly six times.

They are asking us to change the accomplishments of the past 20 years in which nearly nine out of every ten farm homes have become electrified.

They are asking us to change the accomplishments of the past 20 years of farm price supports; rural telephone service; soil conservation; reasonable farm credit and crop insurance.

(more)

They are asking the American people to repudiate the accomplishments of the American people themselves. They are asking the American people to turn their backs on progress in the name of despair.

But despite their pleadings, the decision is still up to the American people. They themselves will determine their own destinies. They themselves will decide whether they want to repudiate 20 years of progress through their own efforts.

That is the essential goodness of the American system. The special interests can plead, cajole, and persuade. But only the people can decide. And once their decision is made, all must abide by it.

As an American who believes deeply in the good sense and fairness of his fellow Americans, I am facing the future with confidence. I do not believe we will tear down that which we ourselves have built.

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