I deeply appreciate the honor that your distinguished university has conferred upon me. The things that are happening here today — peaceful, pleasant things — contrast vividly with the tense fear of war abroad. To confer and receive degrees, to dedicate a stadium and to attend a football game — I don't have to point out how fortunate we are to be able to do these things instead of planning air raid precautions.

This is a good time, I should say, to reexamine the principles of our democratic faith. We are a republic, and we are proud of being citizens of a republic. What does it mean to live under a republican form of government? It means first of all that the decisions we make as an organized society are made in the full light of day, amid the freest sort of criticism, with the help of all the people. It means further that the aim behind all our political decisions is the benefit of the whole people. And finally, it means a living conviction that the democratic process represents the best and most civilized way of doing things.

Most people will agree that today the average American has a keener interest in public affairs than he has had for many years. Why is this
true? It is true because the democratic ideal is under fire. All over the world, nations are being called upon to solve complex economic problems; and in some important countries, governments have relapsed into the primeval methods of dictatorship and force. These are not our ways, and almost instinctively we oppose them. So we are quickened in our determination that no problems, however complex, shall interrupt our progress along the high road of democracy.

Democracy differs from dictatorship in that we do not have a leader to do our thinking for us. Democracy lays upon us the obligation to do our thinking. This is a serious obligation at any time. It is especially serious today, when some economic decisions which used to be made in the sphere of private business have become public decisions made by the whole people in the sphere of government.

This new situation already is reflected in a new interest of youth in political affairs, as well as in a changed emphasis of our entire educational system. Not so long ago, college boys were not expected to bother about public questions, and most of them were pretty vague about economics. But today on all sides we see an awakened interest among college youth in all the problems with which they soon will have to deal.

Practically every extension of Governmental activity in the past — even the adoption of the constitution itself — was in its time denounced as a menace to liberty, merely because it represented a strengthening of the powers of government. Yet the constitution turned out to be a safeguard of liberty. Chief Justice Marshall said of it, that it was "intended to endure for ages to come and consequently to be adapted to the various crises of human affairs."
The last few years have seen a great extension of governmental activity, and as an extension very properly has met with criticism not merely in its technical detail but on the fundamental point of whether it served the general welfare.

The relief and work relief agencies with which I have been associated are only one of such several large extensions of governmental activity. I should like to discuss four of these extensions; the first is the federal relief program.

Direct relief and work relief activities now exist on a gigantic scale in comparison with past times. Millions of people are involved. Now let us ask, is this the beginning of the end of the American system? Is this the first step on the road which Rome traveled to her downfall? I am completely convinced it is not, and I will tell you why.

If we kept millions of people out of work, allowed them to lose their skills and their morale, and maintained them on a dole, so that they ate or starved at a governmental nod -- that, I truly believe, would be a dangerous policy, threatening the downfall of American institutions.

But the Federal Government has not pursued such a policy. When millions of people needed to be fed, the Federal Government fed them. But it did not maintain that situation a moment longer than was necessary. As quickly as possible those millions of people were divided into two great groups -- those who were able to work and those who were not. The unemployables were turned back to the care of our States and local communities, with such assistance as the Federal Government could render through the newly established system of social security. A decent provision for the aged, the blind and other groups certainly represents no danger to our democratic institutions.
For the able-bodied unemployed who are in need, the Federal Government has developed a work program. Through cooperation with States and local communities, they are given useful and needed public work to do.

Now was this work program imposed on the American people? Was it established by an irresponsible, dictatorial Government? Or was it created in response to a public demand -- a demand which was expressed through our elected representatives and realized with appropriations from year to year? Have the American people had an opportunity to abolish the work program if they did not approve of it? Does it continue to exist by virtue of overwhelming popular approval? You know the answers to all these questions.

The work program was democratic in its origin, and its continuance represents the democratic will of the American people. Far from menacing our free economic institutions, it has been a consistent help to them. It maintains a labor reserve for private industry. It maintains our social fabric by assisting those who have been thrown out of work through no fault of their own. And it stimulates recovery through the very act of disbursing purchasing power into the hands of those that need it and spend it.

The attack on the Work Program proceeds from those who talk of "economy". Perhaps many will think that I am not the man to say what economy is. But I know what it is not. To permit idle men with their families to starve; to let our schools close; to permit our water supplies to become depleted or polluted; to let our city streets become a maze of holes; to see our land wash away and our homes go to rack is not economy. I make bold to say that to use the wealth we have to put our idle people to work in the task of the internal development of our common country and in the conservation of our natural resources is real economy. To fail to do so renders us
wasteful and poor and helpless. To do so makes us strong, to grow, and to protect our liberty and democracy against the enemies within and without. That is the heart of the Work Program.

Second, I would like to take up the Federal Government's activities in behalf of distressed farmers. It is a subject I have followed with close interest ever since as Administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration I had the responsibility of helping over 2,000,000 farm families.

The magnitude of these numbers is something to make us pause. Only a part of this vast volume of rural need is traceable to depression causes. Basically, the entrance of the Federal Government into rural relief revealed a long-time problem of poverty which is not only a blot on the nation but actually a cancer menacing the existence of our economic order.

At long last the Federal Government has begun a many-sided attack on rural poverty. At the beginning we thought our agriculture was self-sufficing. We have extended aid to railroads in gigantic land subsidies. We have protected industry by tariffs and now we see that all these things were done at the expense of the farmers. Not only have we failed to give subsidies to farmers but by the action of our government we have inflated the things they bought and deflated the things that they sold. And we have seen the wealth of the soil and the strength of the people who till it taken out and become stagnant in depositories in the cities. Only the power of the government can start the golden stream to flowing again; can restore to the farmers and to the soil some of the wealth that has been taken from them; can energize agriculture to recreate the raw materials that industry needs and replace idleness and despair in city and country with action and hope.

And that is the essence of the farm policy. Disagree with some of its techniques, if you will; strive to perfect it as you can -- but do
not let people frighten you by cries of "paternalism" nor greedy interests convince you that forth-right, just and democratic action is dictatorship.

Poverty, as everybody knows, brings other ills in its train, and most of these ills help to perpetuate the poverty from which they spring. There is the lack of education, which is perhaps the greatest factor in continuing poverty. Yet we have long pursued a policy which gives education or denies it, solely on the basis of local resources and we call that equality of opportunity. This reminds me of a French satire in which the writer was boasting about the complete equality of certain laws. These laws made it illegal to beg or steal or sleep under the bridges at night, and the writer pointed out with great solemnity that these privileges were denied to the rich and the poor alike. Our educational opportunities are very similar. We allow the children of any community, rich or poor, just as good an education as that community is able to pay for.

The Federal Government now is beginning to correct those educational inequalities. It has helped build decent schools in communities where they could not be built entirely with local funds. A vast program of adult education has been undertaken. Over a million adult persons have been taught how to read and write. Library services have been established in remote regions. I readily admit that these efforts are still far from adequate. But they bring the light and advance the cause of freedom.

I think you will agree that there never can be too much education, and that education never can be a menace to liberty. Rather it is an instrument of liberation.

But bare education, bare knowledge, is not enough. It is necessary at the same time to remove the economic handicaps which these people face. Can we expect a tenant farmer to be wiser and more far-sighted than the country's leadership? What do we expect of him if our so-called best minds
neglect proper land policies and fail socially to foster proper use of the soil? Economic drifting has carried us to the disastrous one-crop system and the blight of farm tenancy itself. We might as well honestly admit that we have created a situation in which many individuals are powerless to lift themselves out of their poverty by their own efforts.

The soil is an undivided national heritage. Whoever ruins the soil he farms not only ruins that particular piece of soil for future generations, but ruins his neighbors' soil as well. An erosion gully that starts on one farm does not stop at the individual property stakes, does not stop at county lines -- it does not even recognize the inter-state commerce clause.

The more I study these questions the more am I convinced that the measures taken by this administration are only a beginning of what needs to be done. But I am glad that the beginning has been carefully chosen along the lines of liberty. We have not attempted to take over the land and make our farmers serfs of the state. Instead we have put the resources of the government at the service of the farmers in order to help them help themselves. We have encouraged farmers to conserve the land in the social interest. We have withdrawn from cultivation land that should not have been cultivated and turned it to forests and parks. We have aided hundreds of thousands of farmers with rehabilitation loans and with constructive plans of diversification of crops. Finally, through the Farm Tenancy Act we have made a beginning in the way of helping farmers up the agricultural ladder to independent ownership.

Now let me discuss a fourth phase of governmental extension — the program of economic stabilization represented in the new Wages and Hours Act. This is not only a program to raise the earning and better
the working conditions of exploited groups of labor, but also to raise the earnings and prosperity of exploited sections of the country.

As you know, the Wages and Hours Act was passed by Congress only after a bitter and stubborn fight. We heard much to the effect that it was a menace to liberty. But it seemed to me that the freedom which was being menaced was a highly imaginary freedom — what really was menaced was the right to exploit labor. Whenever any protective labor legislation is being discussed, we find workers pleading with legislators not to interfere with their liberty to work under degrading sweatshop condition. Their fear is that new laws might deprive them of their livelihood altogether. Their vision is so clouded by years of exploitation that they tend to regard the removal of exploitation as a menace to their interest.

The Wages and Hours bill produced a similar situation. It was not opposed by any section of labor, but it was opposed by some sectional industrial interests. Why? On the mistaken idea that by raising Southern Wages, and more nearly on a level with those of the North, this Act would deprive the South of its livelihood! This was not, of course, the voice of the true South.

The per capita income of the South — a land with unrivalled natural resources -- is exactly half of what it is in the rest of the country. Low wages and long hours of labor are known to be one of the causes making for this condition.

There you have my view of four great extensions of governmental authority in recent years. Let me repeat that we must be ever watchful over the future of our democracy. But we must have more than a merely negative concern which questions new measure. We also must have a positive urge to make democracy work under modern conditions. To survive, democracy
must protect the life, liberty and livelihood of all its citizens. The fundamental threat to democracy is not from evil men at home or abroad. It is from democracy's failure to provide ways and means for its citizens to earn a livelihood. Men and women in dire need are not free. Men and women do not value the right to starve, or even the right to a dole. They demand the right to earn a self-respecting livelihood. We live in a changing economic world, and it does no good to laud the virtues of democracy and liberty unless we can fit those virtues to our own time.

Since 1933, the American people have actively dedicated themselves to the task of assuring, under modern conditions, the right of all our citizenship to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The steps which have been taken are yet far from complete, but because of the progress already made I believe we can look ahead with confidence.

There is a story about Benjamin Franklin which seems applicable today. He was attending the Constitutional Convention and during all the clashes and difficulties he had looked frequently at a painting on the wall in which the artist had tried to paint a sun rise. In the hours of deepest doubt Franklin could not decide whether it was a rising or setting sun. The lines, the colors, the shadows seemed too nearly alike. But when it was all over he realized that the sun was rising.

There have been times in the past few years when with the old in complete collapse, and the new hardly well started, it may have seemed to some of us that we were looking at the setting sun of democracy but gradually as the more orderly pattern became clear we all have come to know that the picture we see is that of the rising sun. A picture of the victorious advance of democracy in America.