

Speech by Fiorella H. La Guardia (Transcription)

TAPE TRANSCRIPT (8/26/85) Tape C1, Side A (original cassette W11, Side A) Speaker: Fiorella LaGuardia

So, we must talk now about what we are going to do, and plan accordingly. And I want to express my thanks to Judge Samuel Seabury, who's given so much to this city, who has made clean government possible in this city. Now he started before '34. Remember my campaign of 1929, when I told the city of the rotten conditions that existed here? Remember when I was nominated by the Republican party in '29, and dropped the next day? (Laughs.) That was a hard campaign. I remember that, Marie, that was a tough campaign. But it was useful, wasn't it? The charges that I made were so startling that-- said could hardly be so-- and Judge Seabury proved beyond any reasonable doubt that all the charges that I made were true. I want to thank Judge. I also want to thank the group of friends who got together and petitioned, as it were, for my nomination. I know you meant well. And I know you were interested only in good government, and I want to thank each and every one of you for your confidence and for your courage. And for your unselfish interest in our city. But of course that isn't my technique. When I want a nomination, I submit it to the people and not to political bosses. But it did bring out the fact that we must elect a mayor this year. And I want to make very clear that I appreciate the very kind efforts. I will not enter the Republican primaries. I am not a candidate for the Republican nomination for mayor. Now there're other groups, and I want to make very clear again that the decision must be left to the people. I want to ask my very good friends of the American Labor Party not to nominate me and not to put my name on their petition. I am not going to run for mayor this year. I have many reasons, and I will give them to you.

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As you know, it's been so amusing to observe the panorama in the last few months. This panorama of politicians, this panorama of scheming and conniving. To do what? To join forces to destroy a good administration. Of course it's always difficult for gentry of that kind to get together. Erickson and Costello and Adonis--the rest of the racketeers--perhaps have not yet agreed. But haven't they been confused? Haven't you seen all this maneuvering? Yes. And some very high officials holding certain offices that are not supposed to be in politics have been brain busting some of this connivance and conspiracy to destroy good government. Of course, I knew all along. My friends, this decision wasn't made yesterday or today. This decision was made back in 1941. So that I've been carrying on with the full knowledge of what I was going to do, knowing that the job was completed, and that now it was up to the people of this city to decide whether they want to keep clean, decent government for clean, law-abiding people in our city, for the children of our city, or whether they want to return to the political riffraff, to the tinhorns, chislers, and the racketeers, and the tin boxes. That's for the people to decide. And it must be decided along that issue alone. For instance, the other evening at the National Republican Club there was quite a debate on the subject. And there you have a level of intelligence somewhat higher than district clubs. And what was the discussion there? Well, will LaGuardia support the governor next year? If we support his this year, how do we know that he will support the governor next year? Yes, how would you know? I don't know. And I wouldn't make any such dirty deal. I don't know who I'll support next year. It all depends on the issues and the candidates. But, what I want to point out is that the selection of a candidate for mayor should be only on fitness, and not on any political expediency.

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Now, there are many reasons why I think I shouldn't run. First, there is always the danger of one becoming sort of stale in office, and I don't want to become stale at any time. I don't want to become indifferent. I don't want to become so callous that I couldn't get indignant--yes--and impatient and lose my temper when I hear of graft and corruption and when I hear of crime and racketeering. No, I don't want to go that way. And then there's also a tendency that an administration may become satisfied. It becomes sort of snug and satisfied: "Oh, we're doing so well." Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no--that's not good. I want to keep on my toes a11 the time. I want my government to keep on its toes all the time, my commissioners to be on their toes. And change is good. And then another thing, you know, if an individual is in an executive office too long, he may become bossy. And they tell me I'm sort of inclined that way at times, so that's something else I must look at. But now here is something that I think is important. I do not believe that in our form of government chief executives should be reelected time after time. The government of the city of New York is so large that it cannot be compared with smaller municipalities. Our city government is larger and greater and more involved than that of any state in the Union, including our own. And so while it may be good in a small community for one to stay on the job as mayor, I don't think it's wholesome in a city or a government as big as ours. Rotation in office is good and is wholesome. It is necessary in a democracy. It does not mean that because we have rotation it must necessarily go from good to bad or from bad to worse. If that were true, it would indeed be a sad commentary on our democracy. And in these times, there's a tendency to rally around an individual. It is our democratic system that is important today, not

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individuals. If democracy cannot be retained and improved through proper rotation in office, then something is wrong with the system. And I refuse to believe that there is anything wrong with our democratic system. Oh, now I can almost hear you say, "There

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goes LaGuardia again; he's inconsistent. Didn't you support the president for a third and fourth term?" Yes, I did. And under the same circumstances, I would do it again. Under different circumstances, I would not have done it. It did not require a great student of history or an expert on European politics in 1940 to know that our country would be involved in war. It did not require much of a military genius to know of our complete and utter lack of defense and of military preparation in 1940. I knew that even our own coast out here was not properly protected and we had no means of protecting it in those days. It will not be long before the relived conditions that existed in 1940 and the frantic preparations and the building up of our defense of our coasts and mainland will become history. I had some little part in the preparation of that far? as a member of the permanent joint board on defense with Canada. No one in our entire country had the knowledge of European affairs and the grasp of the situation as did President Roosevelt. I did not like the third term. I don't think the president himself liked the third term. I supported him because under those conditions and the danger that we were facing at the time, I considered it the best interest of our country that the president should remain in office. In 1944, no other decision could be made. There was no choice. And of course, the American people responded. A great many of my very good friends who are really interested in clean and unpolitical city government worked hard to drive out the forces of corruption from city hall and were responsible for my election back

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in 1934. They were hurt and disappointed that I did support the president in 1940. I did it with my eyes open. I knew that I was hurting my friends and that they were disappointed. I was sorry and told them at the time. I did what I believed was the best interest of our country. Now, of course, as these machines are created, they have terrible power. My friends, if in 1934 when I came here, I would just have played along with a political party, it would not have been difficult to build up a powerful machine in this state. Or I could

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have built up a personal political machine. But I could not have given you the kind of government that you've had for 12 years and that I know you wanted. The city would not be as it is today, and I would not have been myself. I know politics well, and you know that I know and could have built up quite a powerful political machine. Others have done it, and some are doing it in this state today. I was interested in the future of my city; I was not interested in my own political future. I did not hesitate. Look around your city now. Where are the politicians in office? Can Valentine and Walsh control any votes, or Cary of sanitation, <Stebbins?> of health, Verniker(?) of hospitals-- are they county chairmen or district leaders? McKenzie of <unintelligible text>, Moss of license, Wilson of housing--do they represent any political party? Wilkinson of <unintelligible text> or Patterson--can they swing at nominations? Oh, no, but they know their jobs. Clydale of purchase, <unintelligible text> of public works, Murdock of standards and appeals--are they political wire-pullers and fixers of the old days? Bob Moses, the builder, he tried it once. He couldn't get many votes for himself, but he's a great commissioner. These men just know their jobs. And this is the big thing, my friends--there is no fixing, there is no graft, there is no favoritism, there is no stealing. That is the big difference between a non-political, non-partisan, scientific government and the old kind that you threw out of

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office back in nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Now there are some personal reasons. I'll be 63 in December. I still have, I hope, some years of useful service left in me. I've had the opportunity during the past 40 years that I've been in public service of acquiring some experience and some training. Now I've worked very hard; I've had hardly no vacation or rest since I've been in office, here as mayor for 12 years. It's just been one thing after the other.

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