

FDR_1940_1025_The President Has to Do Something

Date: 1940-10-25

Participant: Franklin D. Roosevelt Sr.

Participant: J. Frederick Essary

Participant: Stephen T. Early

Participant: Unidentified Speaker

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: “The President Has to Do Something”

SCENE SETTER: Speaking with news reporters just prior to the 1940 election, President Roosevelt highlighted several theaters in the expanding global war, “any one of which,” he noted, “might get worse.” In the event they did so, the burden of response lay with his office. He maintained that “the President has to do something about those things,” indicating that the presidency itself was expanding in scope.

J. Frederick “Fred” Essary: Mr. President, do you care to indicate what general phase of the international situation is now—may be receiving your special attention?

President Roosevelt: I don’t think so. I guess we both read the papers, and I also get a lot of dispatches, which confirm some of the things in the papers and some that don’t. [*Chuckles.*] It’s all rather speculative.

Essary: The reason I asked was because there’s been numerous queries alleging or insinuating that possibly some inquiries would be addressed to you through Spain.

President Roosevelt: I haven’t had anything like that at all. No.

Unidentified Speaker: Mr. President—

President Roosevelt: But if you know—again, like you want background—and this has got to be background; it can’t be attributed to me—just to take an example, you’ve got in the papers four different situations, any one of which might get worse. On the other hand, any one of them might get better.

There is, first, the question of Spain, which you mentioned. Secondly, there’s the question of the French fleet, which you know is—from the papers, I’d say, is under discussion at the present time over there. And third is Greece and the Balkans. And the fourth is the Far East. So there you have, at the present moment—and things change awfully fast—four possibilities of trouble. It doesn’t mean involvement of us in any way, but it means all kinds of things that have to be done by the President. Proclamations, getting Americans out, executive orders. What do they call it, the tying up of money?

Stephen T. “Steve” Early: Freezing [*unclear*].

President Roosevelt: Yeah, freezing of money in banks in this country. In other words, the President has to do something about those things. And that being the case, I can’t go more than 12 hours away from Washington [D.C.].

CITATION: “Franklin D. Roosevelt Sr., J. Frederick Essary, Stephen T. Early, and Unidentified Speaker on 25 October 1940,” White House Press Conference #692, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.