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Upstate Medical University marks 75 years

By: Bill Carey

It was originally known as the School of Medicine, part of Syracuse University. Today, it is called Weiskotten Hall. There were ceremonies Thursday marking the 75th anniversary of its dedication. YNN's Bill Carey says those echoes from 1936 may not be as dated as you might think.

SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- The event, 75 years ago, had marked the birth of Upstate Medical University. The cornerstone of the building dedicated by a very special visitor: The President of the United States.

Franklin Roosevelt had played a major role in the project. His public works authority, designed to help pull the nation out of a depression, had provided the lion's share of funding.

"There's so many facilities that we have today, parks facilities and colleges and hospitals and schools, that we're still enjoying today, 75 years later, because of the investment that these public works projects made," said Dennis Connors of the Onondaga Historical Association.

After his appearance at Weiskotten Hall, the President here to the New York State Armory in Syracuse, where the democratic state convention was underway. It was here he delivered his first speech of the 1936 re-election campaign. A campaign that sounds very familiar these days.

A democrat elected at a time of economic turmoil, voicing a message of hope. And pressing for huge outlays of federal dollars to invest in infrastructure projects, putting Americans back to work. But recovery was moving slowly.

"When he came here in 1936, he had initiated a lot of his New Deal programs, which a lot of the country was not particularly comfortable with. A lot of them were under attack by the republicans," Connors said.

A speech delivered by Roosevelt's GOP challenger in Buffalo that year sounds like it was written by republicans in 2011.

"There will seem to be no end to the money which the government can spend. But, in due time, the day of reckoning must come. Someone, sometime, will have to pay the bill," 1936 GOP Presidential Nominee Alf Landon said.

Franklin Roosevelt went on to win re-election in 1936.

One of those at Weiskotten Hall in 2011 thinks he knows why. Dr. Murray Grossman was just 13 when he went to see Roosevelt speak that day. The message then, he says, makes just as much sense today.

"Our infrastructure's a mess. Our schools are a problem. We need to invest. Even though we're short of money, you can't stop investing in progress," Grossman said.

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