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**FDR's Friendly Conspiracy with the
Press**

Lead: Few people knew that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a man of immense energy and enthusiasm, in the prime of life, was crippled by polio.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: FDR was an up-and-coming politician. He had been the Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I, received the Democrat nomination for Vice-president, campaigned vigorously

with James M. Cox and with him was buried in the Republican landslide of 1920. Then a painful tragedy struck his life and interrupted his steady political ascent. While vacationing on Canada's Campobello Island in August, 1921 he was stricken with a severe case of poliomyelitis, for a time was almost completely paralyzed, and lost the use of his legs.

For many office seekers this might have signaled the end of a promising career, in fact some Roosevelt family members counseled him to retire, but FDR was no ordinary politician. After an initial period of depression, with the help of his wife Eleanor and longtime confidant and secretary, Louis McHenry Howe, Roosevelt

recovered his optimism and set out to learn to walk again. It was not easy, but he knew that if he were to have a future in electoral politics he would have to appear vigorous even though he would never again be able to use his legs. What he accomplished was an illusion. His energy and style distracted voters from the fact that with his powerfully developed upper torso, aided by a cane and often supported on the arms of one of his tall sons, he thrust his hips forward and dragged his useless legs along. He was helped in this feat of conjuration by an admiring press corps who conspired to hide his paralysis from the voting public. Pictures or movies of Governor and then President Roosevelt were arranged to mask his

physical struggle. As a result the longest-serving American President was elected repeatedly by an electorate, many of whom had no idea their leader was a cripple. Perhaps his effectiveness in bringing America through depression and war was enhanced by the struggle to overcome this physical handicap.

Research assistance provided by Doug Schaefer, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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