

Text of Rockefeller's Letter to Dr. Butler

The text of John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s letter to Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, in which he favors repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, follows:

26 Broadway, New York.

June 6, 1932.

President Nicholas Murray Butler,
Columbia University,
New York City.

My dear President Butler:

The morning papers print a resolution which it is stated you are proposing to offer for incorporation in the platform of the Republican party at the national convention in Chicago next week. I quote the resolution in full:

Resolved, That we reaffirm the declaration of Republican doctrine made by the Republican National Convention of 1860, when it nominated Abraham Lincoln for President, namely: "That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of powers on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depends", and

That we also reaffirm the declaration of Republican doctrine made by the Republican National Convention of 1884, when it nominated James G. Blaine for President, namely: "The people of the United States, in their organized capacity, constitute a nation, and not a mere confederacy of States; the National Government is supreme within the sphere of its national duties; but the States have reserved rights which should be faithfully maintained; each should be guarded with jealous care, so that the harmony of our system of government may be preserved and the Union kept inviolate."

To the end that these declarations of principle may be made effective, that the distribution of powers between the States and the nation as originally established by the Constitution may be preserved, and that the several States may be enabled, in such ways as their public opinion shall direct and sustain, to deal promptly, effectively and constructively with the problems of the liquor traffic in the light of the experience of our own and other nations, we ask that the Congress submit a proposal to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment, which proposal shall be submitted for ratification by conventions of the people of the several States in accordance with the provisions of Article V of the Constitution of the United States.

Should the Eighteenth Amendment be repealed, the Republican party pledges its influence and authority to secure the adoption

of such measures for the control of the liquor traffic by the several States as will promote temperance, effectively abolish the saloon, whether open or concealed, and bring the liquor traffic itself, when not prohibited, under complete public supervision and control.

While the Eighteenth Amendment remains upon the statute books it should be obeyed.

With this resolution I am in complete sympathy and earnestly hope not only that it will be incorporated in the Republican platform, but that a similar resolution will be incorporated in the Democratic platform, thus taking the question of repeal out of the field of partisan politics.

My position may surprise you, as it will many of my friends. I was born a teetotaler; all my life I have been a teetotaler on principle. Neither my father nor his father ever tasted a drop of intoxicating liquor, nor have I. My mother and her mother were among the dauntless women of their day, who, hating the horrors of drunkenness, were often found with bands of women of like mind, praying on their knees in the saloons in their ardent desire to save men from the evils that so commonly sprang from those sources of iniquity. Although a teetotaler on principle and in practice, I have always stood for whatever measure seemed at the time to give promise of best promoting temperance. With my father, I for years supported the Anti-Saloon League in both its State and national work. It was at one time reported that our contributions toward the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment amounted to between \$15,000,000 and \$30,000,000. As I have previously stated, from the year 1900 up to and including the date of passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, the contributions of my father and myself to all branches of the Anti-Saloon League, Federal and State—the only contributions made by us in support of prohibition legislation aggregated \$350,000.

When the Eighteenth Amendment was passed I earnestly hoped—with a host of advocates of temperance—that it would be generally supported by public opinion and thus the day be hastened when the value to society of men with minds and bodies free from the undermining effects of alcohol would be generally realized. That this has not been the result, but rather that drinking generally has increased; that the speakeasy has replaced the saloon, not only unit for unit, but probably two-fold if not three-fold; that a vast army of lawbreakers has been recruited and financed on a colossal scale; that many of our best citizens, piqued at what they regarded as an infringement of their private rights, have openly and unabashed disregarded the Eighteenth Amendment; that as an inevitable result respect for all law has been greatly lessened; that

crime has increased to an unprecedented degree—I have slowly and reluctantly come to believe.

I am not unmindful of the great blessing which the abolition of the saloon has been to our country or of certain other benefits that have resulted from the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment. It is my profound conviction, however, that these benefits, important and far reaching as they are, are more than outweighed by the evils that have developed and flourished since its adoption, evils which, unless promptly checked, are likely to lead to conditions unspeakably worse than those which prevailed before.

It is not to be expected that the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment will in itself end all these evils and restore public respect for law. I believe, however, that its repeal is a prerequisite to the attainment of that goal. I am informed that should repeal become effective, all the machinery for controlling the liquor traffic built up in the respective States and in the nation throughout the many years prior to the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment would with few exceptions be in force, strengthened by various Federal laws and court decisions having to do with the regulation of interstate commerce. Moreover, were the Eighteenth Amendment to be repealed, sufficient time ought to be given before repeal became effective to permit the various States through legislative action representing public opinion to set up such new safeguards or methods with reference to the handling of alcoholic beverages as seemed best calculated to insure adequate and proper control of the traffic in the interest of temperance, and at the same time safeguard the normal liberty of action of the individual.

There are many who, feeling as I do that the Eighteenth Amendment has not accomplished the object which its enactment sought to attain, would willingly favor its repeal were some alternate method that gave promise of better results offered as a substitute. In my judgment it will be so difficult for our people as a whole to agree in advance on what the substitute should be, and so unlikely that any one method will fit the entire nation, that repeal will be far less possible if coupled with an alternate measure. For that reason I the more strongly approve the simple, clear-cut position you are proposing to recommend and which I shall count it not only a duty but a privilege to support.

My hope is that the tremendous effort put forth in behalf of the Eighteenth Amendment by millions of earnest, consecrated people will be continued in effective support of practical measures for the promotion of genuine temperance. To that cause my own efforts will ever be devoted.

Very sincerely,
JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR.