When President Herbert Hoover took office, the unemployment rate was 4.4 percent. When he left, it was 23.6 percent. During the early days of the Great Depression, Hoover launched the largest public works projects up until his time. But he continued to believe that problems of poverty and unemployment were best left to "voluntary organization and community service." He feared that federal relief programs would undermine individual character by making recipients dependent on the government. He did not recognize that the sheer size of the nation's economic problems had made the concept of "rugged individualism" meaningless.

Press Statement Issued by President Hoover on February 3, 1931
...This is not an issue as to whether people shall go hungry or cold in the United States. It is solely a question of the best method by which hunger and cold shall be prevented. It is a question as to whether the American people on one hand will maintain the spirit of charity and mutual self help through voluntary giving and the responsibility of local government as distinguished on the other hand from appropriations out of the Federal Treasury for such purposes. My own conviction is strongly that if we break down this sense of responsibility of individual generosity to individual and mutual self help in the country in times of national difficulty and if we start appropriations of this character we have not only impaired something infinitely valuable in the life of the American people but have struck at the roots of self-government. Once this has happened it is not the cost of a few score millions but we are faced with the abyss of reliance in future upon Government charity in some form or another. The money involved is indeed the least of the costs to American ideals and American institutions...

...I have indeed spent much of my life in fighting hardship and starvation both abroad and in the southern states... I am proud to have sought the help of Congress in the past for nations who were so disorganized by war and anarchy that self help was impossible. But even these appropriations were but a tithe of that which was coincidently mobilized from the public charity of the United States and foreign countries. There is no such paralysis in the United States and I am confident that our people have the resources, the initiative, the courage, the stamina and kindliness of spirit to meet this situation in the way they have met their problems over generations.

I will accredit to those who advocate Federal charity a natural anxiety for the people of their states. I am willing to pledge myself that if the time should ever come that the voluntary agencies of the country together with the local and state governments are unable to find resources with which to prevent hunger and suffering in my country, I will ask the aid of every resource of the Federal Government because I would no more see starvation amongst our countrymen than would any senator or congressman. I have the faith in the American people that such a day will not come...

Questions
1. How did Hoover believe the U.S. should handle the problems of the Great Depression?
2. Why did he have this conviction?
3. What pledge does Hoover make to the American people?