KEYNOTE ADDRESS

OF

J. Strom Thurmond
GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA

BEFORE

STATES' RIGHTS
DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

MAY 10, 1948
Governor Wright, Governor Laney, and Fellow Democrats of the South:

We have gathered here today because the American system of free constitutional government is in danger.

We are here because we have been betrayed in the house of our fathers, and we are determined that those who committed this betrayal shall not go unpunished.

We intend to meet the challenge and save constitutional government in the United States.

We shall discharge our responsibility as Democrats true to the principles of our Party, and demonstrate to the Nation that the spirit which kindled this Republic still lives in the South.

Whenever a great section of this country is regarded as so politically impotent that one major political party insults it because it is "in the bag", and the other party scorns it because there is no chance of victory, then the time has arrived for corrective and concerted action.

When this campaign is over, leaders in both political parties will realize we no longer intend to be a door mat on which Presidential candidates may wipe their political shoes every time they want to appeal to minority groups in doubtful states.

We are sick and tired of the meretricious leadership that now dominates our Party. We have stripped decks for action. The fight is on and we will not lay our armor down until the present leadership of the Democratic Party is repudiated and the South is again recognized as a political entity of these United States.

I appreciate more than I can tell you the honor which you have bestowed upon me on this important occasion.

I told Governor Wright during the Southern Governors' activity I would be glad to attend this meeting in Mississippi, and do what I could for the cause. In accepting his invitation I did not expect to be honored by being asked to make your keynote address. I have enjoyed working with Governor Wright and also Governor Laney. Both have rendered outstanding service in this movement.
We believe in the cause for which the South is fighting, and we are determined that we shall win.

We of the South are a proud people. We come from a stock that has never truckled even in the face of defeat or rule by Federal bayonet.

We meet here today with no apology. We want no one to be mistaken or misled. We are going to fight, as long as we have breath, for the rights of our states and our people under the American Constitution; and come what may, we are going to preserve our civilization in the South.

In these days when some of our leaders, yes, leaders of our own Democratic Party, think it popular to insult the South and strike at the heart of our institutions, I would remind them again of the contribution the South has made in the building of this Nation.

From the Southern states first came the call for a declaration of independence. It was the great Southerner, Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that immortal document. What the sage of Monticello proclaimed by pen, another great Southerner, George Washington, won with his sword.

After we had won our independence we were without the machinery of government to preserve and perpetuate it. From the South came the movement that resulted in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Over that Convention Washington presided. The main principles which the delegates wrote into the Constitution were taken from plans drawn up by James Madison of Virginia and Charles Pinckney of South Carolina.

We have only to read the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention to know the part played by the states we represent in creating our government.

We do not forget that of the first 25 Presidents, the South contributed 10. In those critical formative years of our Republic, Southern Presidents held the reins of government for 53 years.

Not only in the affairs of government, but in economics, in science, in social development, in education, in religion, and in every field of endeavor that contributes to human progress, the South has made its full contribution in the building of our country.
Our progress was set back many decades by the War Between the States. We are not here to fight that war over again. It is only fair to say, however, that even in those days the South suffered from vicious propaganda. No effort was spared to make it appear that we fought to perpetuate human slavery, and thereby obscure the fundamental constitutional and economic issues which brought on that unhappy conflict.

When the war was over, we were subjected to the bitter Reconstruction period. We experienced first hand the ordeal of a conquered and occupied land. Our economy was destroyed, and we had to rebuild on the foundation of a shattered civilization. The slaves who had been freed as a war measure were left as a millstone around our neck. The burden of recovery was made more difficult by the necessity of caring for these former slaves while overcoming the dislocation and destruction left in the path of war.

Throughout the whole period which has elapsed since that time, we of the South, and we alone, have cared and provided for the Negroes in our midst, and the progress which has been made by that race is a tribute to the efforts of Southerners, and of Southerners alone. The “emancipators” have done absolutely nothing to make this task easier.

On the contrary, both races have suffered in the economic struggle to overcome artificial barriers to our recovery and growth imposed upon this part of the Nation from without. The wonder is, not how little we have done, but how much we have been able to do for our people under such crushing handicaps.

It was not long after Reconstruction that a freight rate structure was instituted with discriminatory sectional differentials. The industrial progress of the Southeast, for instance, was thwarted by a 39% rate differential on manufactured goods as compared with the Eastern section of the country. The effect of these discriminatory freight rates was to keep the South in a “crown colony” status, producing raw materials for the industrial East, but unable to compete in the establishment of industries to raise our own economic level.

It was not until 1947, after the Southern Governors won their freight rate fight in the Interstate Commerce Commis-
sion and the courts, that we began to get some measure of relief from the destructive effect of this situation.

Our economy was also subjected to another hard blow. In Benjamin Harrison's administration, when the Republicans had to make good their campaign promises to the industrialists of the East who had financed their election, the high tariff was enacted. By means of this device, we in the South were buying our finished goods from the Eastern manufacturers who were protected against price competition from the rest of the world, while at the same time the raw materials which we raised were not so protected; and we had to sell them to the Eastern manufacturers at a price kept lower by foreign competition.

It is of interest here to recall that when the high tariff was proposed in Congress, there also appeared in that body another Force or "Civil Rights" bill, having for its purpose the renewal of reconstruction activities in the Southern states.

Propaganda designed to convince the country that the Southerners were remiss in the discharge of their duty to the Negroes, was heard throughout the land. There was strong Southern resistance to the high tariff legislation, because it would be ruinous to the economic progress of the South in our efforts to increase the level of life of both the white and the colored races alike. Finally, however, the tariff was passed and the Force bill pigeon-holed. Economic advantages were given to the East at the expense of the South, but we escaped the Force bill.

Under the galling yoke of freight rates and tariff, the South has struggled on to regain its rightful economic position in the Nation. While progress has necessarily been slow, it has been steady. Today industry has learned of the many advantages of climate, native labor, industrial peace, favorable taxation, natural resources, and stable government, which our states have to offer. We see giant factories and plants being constructed on all sides. We also hear the wails of other sections over the loss of industries which they possessed for so many years as a result of our defeat in war.

Now, once again, Force bills have made their appearance in the national Congress. Again the American people are being propagandized to believe that Southerners have been mis-
treated the Negroes in our midst, and that we are unfit for local self-government. Again, there is the stirring of old embers, the arousing of old fears, the laceration of old wounds. Every controversial issue which has rocked the Congress since Reconstruction days has been put into the pot.

We hear not a word of the tremendous efforts which we have made through the years to give both races in the South the opportunity to improve and progress.

We hear not a word of the undeniable fact that economic under-privilege in the South has known no color line, and that it has fallen heavily on both races alike.

We hear not a word of recognition of the progress which the Negro in this country has made since slavery days as a result of the efforts of the Southern people.

We are given no credit for the rebuilding of our once devasted section, accomplished without the aid of anything faintly resembling a Marshall Plan.

We are once again disturbing the economic status quo of the industrial East, and this does not suit some people.

Once again legislation is being promoted in the Congress calculated to throw us into confusion and distract our attention from our industrial program, in which our efforts have been succeeding so markedly in recent years.

My friends, I abhor sectionalism. I detest anyone who undertakes to create minority political groups among American citizens.

I stand for the government of the United States, as established in our Constitution, and I am proud of every section of our Nation and its history.

But I would remind you that sectionalism has been practiced against us in the Southern states. We have been singled out on more than one occasion in our history for special and sectional treatment unfavorable to the South.

It is discouraging to us that in this enlightened year 1948, it is still attractive for candidates for public office to bid for the votes of minority blocs and groups in some sections of the country by putting on a show of straightening out the South again.
We slip backward, we lose ground in human and economic progress, when this occurs.

The greatest offense of those who have engaged in this vile performance is the jeopardy into which their ill-considered activities has thrown the forward strides which have been achieved in liberal and progressive thought and viewpoint in the Southern states. The catering in high places to the favor of professional agitators and mercenary missionaries of ill will has recklessly set the stage for a recurrence of reactionism, almost entirely stamped out over the years by the increasingly enlightened public opinion of our people.

Those of us in the South who have worked hard in the cause of liberalism and constructive endeavor in the field of human and economic progress have been forced to turn aside for a time to meet this upsurge of reactionism.

History takes infinitely longer to live than to read. Many overlook this stubborn fact. The task of the liberal in the South today is to save the hard-won ground which we have gained from destruction by ill-advised and irresponsible meddling from without.

The fight which has been thrust upon us is a governmental one, and not a racial one, all of the high-powered propaganda to the contrary notwithstanding.

It is the forward-looking and the liberal-thinking men and women of the South who will carry to a conclusion the solution of our racial as well as our economic and political problems, and the misguided or self-seeking interference to which we are constantly subjected will never contribute anything to that end except confusion and delay.

In our fight against Federal encroachment on state sovereignty, we are sustained by the highest precedent and the best considered opinion which American history has known. We are amazed that people in other states and sections of the country do not more completely realize that their own rights and their own essential liberties are in danger of being diminished and perhaps destroyed by the governmental precedents which the enactment of these new Force bills would establish.

Let us see just how old are the principles on which we stand and how sound is the basis of our opposition.
In his Farewell Address, George Washington, the first President of the United States, stated our case:

"The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositories, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions of the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our country, and under our own eyes.—To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution, or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates.—But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil, any partial or transient benefit which the use can at any time yield."

Thomas Jefferson, in his first Inaugural Address, stated the creed of the Democratic Party to which it has adhered consistently until this very day, in these words:

"The support of the State governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies."

Coming down to our own day and generation, it is peculiarly appropriate to remember the eloquent statement by the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who gave this forceful warning:

"... to bring about government by oligarchy masquerading as democracy, it is fundamentally essential that practically all authority and control be centralized in our National Government. The individual sovereignty of our states must first be destroyed, except in mere minor matters of legislation. We are safe from the danger of any such departure from the principles on which this country was founded just so long as the individual home rule of the states is scrupulously preserved and fought for whenever it seems in danger."

How different from this clear statement of fundamental principles is the action of the man who is filling out the term [9]
of office for which President Roosevelt was elected! He has claimed to be carrying out a Roosevelt policy, and yet neither Franklin D. Roosevelt nor any other American President ever sent to the Congress any such message as the so-called Civil Rights proposals of President Truman.

Franklin Roosevelt was in the White House longer than any other President in history, yet I challenge Harry Truman, or anyone else, to cite a single public utterance where the late President ever advocated the enactment by Congress of any one of the proposals made by President Truman in his so-called Civil Rights Message.

It has been said that the South is in revolt against the Democratic Party.

That is not true. The South is in revolt against the present leadership of the Democratic Party which has repudiated the historic principles upon which the Party was founded and has flourished.

Since the President's proposals were made, and the people have made known their resentment and pointed out the constitutional soundness of their opposition, efforts have been made to create the impression that such proposals do not violate state sovereignty. Let us see how ridiculous that claim is.

One of the proposals is the anti-poll tax law. We all know that the poll tax does not burden the right to vote. It is a minor revenue measure yielding comparatively little money, and I have advocated that we repeal it in my State. Only seven states now have a poll-tax voting requirement, and the proposed Federal law would accomplish so little that many think it harmless legislation.

The danger is the precedent which would be set by the Congressional assertion of the right to pass this law. If Congress can use this law to establish the power to deal with the right of the American people to vote, it can establish a form of Federal suffrage. It can exercise control over the ballot boxes of the Nation. As practical men and women we know that ultimately it would have much to say, not only about who would be President, but also about who would be in the United States Senate and House of Representatives.

When this occurs, the states could lose their effective voice in the national legislative halls as surely as did the Southern
states in Reconstruction days when our ballot boxes were surrounded by Federal soldiers. The way would be open for the conversion of our system of popular government into a centralized and concentrated government in Washington, far distant from the people governed by it.

Such power was deliberately withheld from the Federal Government when the Constitution was adopted. It has always been felt that the right of local self-government depended upon state regulation of the right of suffrage.

When the Senate Rules Committee a few days ago voted 7 to 2, to allow the pending poll-tax legislation to be considered by the Senate, the majority of the Committee admitted that its constitutionality presented a serious question, but stated that the Congress has already decided the point by passing the voting law for members of the armed forces during the war. Let those who doubt the danger of a precedent reflect upon this absurd use made by the Committee of the action taken in time of war under the war clause of the Constitution!

Another law recommended is an anti-lynching law. The Federal government does not have the constitutional right to deal with crimes occurring within the states. It can deal only with Federal crimes.

The Federal courts have uniformly held that there is not even a Federal common law. The states, in governing themselves, are responsible for public peace and order. All the states have laws against murder. Many have specific laws against lynching, which is a cowardly form of murder.

This proposed law is unnecessary because enlightened public opinion has virtually stamped out this crime. It has never been a sectional crime, although some would create the contrary impression for propaganda purposes. In one year, 75% of the persons lynched throughout the United States were white.

Taking advantage of the emotional appeal springing from the horror felt for this crime by every decent person in every section of the Nation, the proposal is made that the Congress assert the power to deal with any crime within the states. This would be a radical invasion of the right of local self-government. It would be a bold extension of the power of the
Federal government over the individual citizens. Nothing would be more effective in bringing about the destruction of the governmental functions and prerogatives of the states of the Union. The division of powers between the Federal government and the states, provided in the Constitution, would be virtually destroyed, if this precedent were created and thereafter carried to its possible conclusion.

Another proposal is the legislation regulating employment, promotion and discharge of the employees of private business and industry within the several states, commonly referred to as the FEPC law. This legislation applies with equal force to our labor organizations and to our businesses and industries. It would enable the Federal government to invade a local field clearly foreclosed to it by the Constitution. The bureaus and commissions created by it would be given power to harass and interfere with business, large and small, and to intrude into the policies and practices of labor unions.

There is no limit to the irritation and annoyance which would result throughout the Nation from this law. Every man's private business would almost be made a public one. If he exercised his right to employ whom he pleased, he would always face the possibility of a call from a government agent, inquiring into why he did not hire someone else; he could be hauled before a Federal commission to explain himself; he could be ordered to stop choosing his employees as he saw fit, and to hire someone he did not want; he would not be allowed a jury trial on the issues of fact between him and the government; and his case would not even go to the Federal Court in his own state, but would be heard ordinarily in a court in another state. The mind of man can hardly conceive of more duress and apprehension than this would produce!

Does this sound like an American concept to you? Does this kind of thing coincide with your ideas of liberty and freedom which we have fought for and thought we had? If the government in Washington can pass this law, it will have like power to intrude itself into every phase of the daily lives of our people and regulate them in all things, great and small.

Another phase of the President's proposals deals with the field of the separation of races.
We in the South know that the laws dealing with the separation of the races are necessary to maintain the public peace and order, where the races live side by side in large numbers. We know that they are essential to the protection of the racial integrity and purity of the white and Negro races alike. We know that their sudden removal would do great injury to the very people sought to be benefited.

We also know that the solution of the racial problems of the South will follow the solution of its economic problems, and that we are making great strides in solving these problems. A little more practical help on economic lines, and a little less fallacious racial theory, would accomplish a great deal more for the improvement of the level of life and opportunity of all our people of whatever race.

The most alarming part of the President's program is the creation of a Federal police system to enforce it. The concept of a Federal police working within the states is utterly foreign to the Constitution of the United States. Gestapo-like, its agents would rove throughout the Nation; policing elections; meddling with private businesses; intervening in private lawsuits; breeding litigation; keeping the people in a state of duress and intimidation; and bringing to our people all the potential evils of a so-called police state. We have only recently seen in Europe how quickly liberty perishes under such a government.

One of the most astounding theories ever advanced is that the Federal government by passing a law can force the white people of the South to accept into their businesses, their schools, their places of amusement, and in other public places, those they do not want to accept.

What is so ridiculous about all of this is that most of the support for the new Force bill is coming from a section of the country which defied the Federal government when an effort was made, not by legislation, mind you, but by a constitutional amendment, to outlaw alcoholic beverages. If the Federal government could not stop people from drinking, then how can a Federal law force people to break off social customs and traditions as old as civilization itself?

These big city machine bosses and their puppets in office, as well as those who think everything can be done by a law
from Washington, should once and for all realize that on the question of social intermingling of the races our people draw the line. No decent and self-respecting Negro would ask for a law to force people to accept him where he is not wanted. They themselves do not want social intermingling. They are entitled to equality of opportunity, and they will get it through our efforts. But all the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army, cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches, and our places of recreation.

And here and now I want to pay tribute to the colored people of the South.

During the influx of racial agitators, our colored people are continuing with their daily tasks, and are not following off after these false prophets who want to create misunderstanding in the South.

We are working and living side by side in peace and understanding. We are struggling together for a bigger and better South, with greater educational and economic opportunity for all of our citizens, regardless of race, creed, or color.

I would like to drive that message home to every American, in every state.

I hope Democrats everywhere will not forget that the South has kept the fires of Democracy burning when other sections deserted the Party.

We have consistently kept Democrats in Congress and held the Party together. Without the South the Democratic Party long ago would have ceased to function as a major political party.

In return for this unswerving loyalty and devotion, we of the South have asked little. We have stood by the Democratic Party, and we expected the Democratic Party to stand by us in preserving our institutions and customs, which are absolutely essential to peaceful living in our section and to the continued development and progress of the South.

Never did we dream that a Democratic President would stab us in the back, and in one fell swoop seek to impose Federal laws more detrimental to the South and the Nation than those proposed in the Reconstruction period by the Republican Party. What makes the stab more humiliating is the fact that the hand that held the dagger received its power not from an
election by the people, but from a minority, which, through pressure applied at the 1944 Democratic Convention, blocked the nomination of a Southerner for Vice-President. We know this from the recent book of Ed Flynn, the Bronx political boss, who boasts of his part in this intrigue.

I love South Carolina and I love the South. I treasure our American system of government. I fought under Eisenhower in Europe and under MacArthur in the Pacific. I did not risk my life on the beaches of Normandy to come back to this country and sit supinely by and permit a bunch of hack politicians to whittle away your heritage and mine.

I have always tried to be a good Democrat, but above loyalty to party I have always placed allegiance to country.

As Democrats, our objective must be to restore the Democratic Party to the principles which have made it great. To accomplish this end we must prepare and take bold and courageous action.

We must be practical. We must realize that a sitting President can, if he so desires, well nigh force his nomination. I had hoped that Harry S. Truman would realize that he had led the Democratic Party to the brink of disaster; that he himself had absolutely no chance of reelection; and that he would withdraw and permit the Democrats to nominate a candidate who can lead the Party to victory.

Apparently the Democratic Party is not to be so blessed.

So far as I am concerned the die is cast and the Rubicon is crossed. I care not whether I ever hold another public office. I am looking for no Federal job. No one has any strings on me.

As the Governor of a sovereign state, I do not intend that the rights of my people shall be sacrificed on the block of blind party loyalty.

Pressure was brought on me at Tallahassee not to offer the resolution which sparked the revolt in the South against the Civil Rights program. No power on earth could have silenced me at Tallahassee. I thought it was the duty of the Southern Governors to speak out, and thank God, they have spoken out.

What has happened since Tallahassee and what is taking place here today show that we mean business.
In general, I recommend to you that the procedure proposed by the Southern Governors’ Conference be carried out as far as possible.

In particular, I say to you that, while it is our duty to send delegates to the National convention, it is important that we see that our people are not hogtied in the November election.

We should recommend that the State Democratic organizations see to it that the credentials of their delegates contain a proviso setting forth the reservations under which they will participate in that convention, or that notice of such reservations be given in writing to the National Committee before they take their seats.

Such a proviso should clearly set forth that the people of the state will not be bound to support the nominees for President and Vice-President if such nominees or the Party itself should advocate the so-called Federal Civil Rights Program.

If we do this, no one will be able to say that we are bolting or breaking faith with the Party if our people shall subsequently cast their electoral votes for others than such nominees.

Should the National convention choose nominees who do not meet this test, or should the Party itself favor such program, then the State Democratic organizations of the several states should immediately take action to see that the electoral votes of the Southern states shall be jointly cast in such manner as shall carry out the manifest will of the people of their states.

We know, and the enemies of state sovereignty know, that the Electoral College affords us a powerful weapon to restore the prestige of the South in the political affairs of this Nation and preserve the American system of free constitutional government.

Make no mistake about it, the South is prepared to use this weapon. Already, Alabama and Florida have spoken. Other states will take similar action. The leadership of the Democratic Party may as well realize that the South’s electoral votes are no longer “in the bag” for the Democratic nominee.

The party bosses and ward heelers who have kidnapped the Democratic Party and deserted its principles may force the nomination of Harry Truman, but they cannot force the South
or the Nation to accept him. Harry S. Truman has never been elected President of the United States and he never will be.

True to the Party's principles, we must and shall see that our electoral votes are cast for those who adhere to those principles, and there are many distinguished men in the South and in the Nation from whom we can choose those we shall center upon.

When we shall have done this we shall restore our people to their rightful place in the political life of the Nation, which they lost through blind political faith in the Party leadership.

We shall have broken the chains binding us to those who have betrayed our trust.

We shall re-establish our autonomy and self-respect, so that no one will ever again assume that we have none.

We shall attest our faith in governmental principles which can never be willingly surrendered by a people who intend to be and remain free and self-governing.

We shall place our sound case before the people of the Nation, Democrat and Republican alike, so that we shall no longer fight alone in resisting encroachments upon the fundamental rights of the people by power-seeking Federal bureaucrats.

We shall win again the struggle for free constitutional government in America which was won before at Yorktown.

We shall uphold, protect and defend the way of life which the Constitution of the United States was ordained to guarantee to the American people throughout our Nation.

On principle, we can do nothing else and be true to our heritage. Our cause is right and just. We shall honor ourselves by pressing it to the end.

I know in my heart what the Southerners who have gone before us would do in the crisis which faces us.

Let us remain true to the trust which they handed to our care, and carry on to final victory.