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States' Rights, 1948 October 1

Strom Thurmond

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Governor, how long, now, have you been a presidential candidate?

Something less than three months. Up until the States Rights Conference in Birmingham, July 17, I had no idea of being in my present position — that of presidential candidate.

Then the Birmingham Conference gave you the nomination?

Not exactly, though that is a common misunderstanding. What did happen was that in Birmingham thousands of Democrats from many states met as private citizens, exercising their right to assemble. Their action had no official standing, but they did recommend that the Democratic Parties of the various states nominate Governor Wright and me as candidates. Between that date and August 11, the Democratic Parties of Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina had acted in accordance with that recommendation, and we formally accepted the nominations of these three states in Houston, August 11.

So you actually became a candidate in the full-fledged sense only last August 11, when three states chose you as their standard bearer.

That is right. However, since that time a number of other states have followed. Governor Wright and I are now candidates in 13 states, on either Democratic, States Rights Democratic, or independent States' Rights tickets. Those states have a total of 142 electoral votes.

How many of those electoral votes do you believe you will get?

I believe I have a good chance of receiving more than 100 electoral votes, and can count on 38 as certain.
Q- You believe then, that you will receive a minimum of 100 votes in the electoral college?
A- Yes.

Q- In what kind of position will this place you in your race for the presidency.
A- There is an excellent chance that 100 votes cast for me would throw the election into the House of Representatives, where I believe I would have a better chance than either Mr. Truman or Mr. Dewey.

Q- Governor, would you elaborate a bit on that answer?
A- Well, to be elected, either of the other candidates would have to receive 266 electoral votes. I do not believe either of them will. Their failure to receive a majority of electoral votes would send the choice of the president to the House, where one of the three with the greatest number of votes would be elected. But in the House, the vote is by states, with each state having one vote. That would give the South a greater voice. There is another thing to remember also; in the event the election is underway in the House and the first ballot, or first few ballots, result in a stalemate, there are many state delegations which would switch their support to the States' Rights candidate but who never would switch from Truman to Dewey or vice-versa.

I FEEL SURE THAT THERE IS A VERY GOOD POSSIBILITY THAT THIS ELECTION WILL BE DECIDED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AND I AM QUITE CONFIDENT THAT IN SUCH A CIRCUMSTANCE, I HAVE A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF ELECTION THAN EITHER MR. DEWEY OR MR. TRUMAN.

Q- Governor, that is a very confident statement. Do you have any feeling of this being sort of "in the bag."
A- Not by any means. I am afraid that Mr. Truman may not do as well in some states as I hope he does. And although I feel quite certain of some states
where I am a candidate, there are others where the outcome is questionable.

Q- Where, for example?
A- Mainly Kentucky. You know that there is a native son situation there with the Democratic vice-presidential candidate being a Kentuckian and having widespread political connections there. States' Rights supporters are numerous in Kentucky, but we will have a tougher fight there than in many other states.

Q- What will be your method of attack in the face of such a situation?
A- The main thing is to get out the voters who are so disgusted with the other parties that they plan not to even bother to vote. I was in Kentucky last week, and learned that there are thousands upon thousands of voters who just refuse to vote for either Truman or Dewey. Many of them do not realize that their vote for the States' Rights ticket would be a telling blow, and they just plan to stay home. I was told in Kentucky by a Truman supporter that if all the people who are sympathetic to the States' Rights movement and who do not plan to vote, do decide to turn out on November 2, we can carry Barkley's own state.

Q- How do you feel about your chances here in Maryland?
A- Well, Maryland has a distinguished record of electing supporters of States' Rights Democracy. I have mentioned since I have been here in Maryland that throughout the past three-quarters of a century, Marylanders have been foremost in defending states' rights, local self-government against proposed federal violations. Back in 1890, when Congressman Lodge of Massachusetts introduced a Force Bill to impose federal control over elections -- a measure similar to the presently proposed federal election bill -- it was your Maryland Senator Gorman who took the most conspicuous part in the prolonged battle to defeat it. That Senate battle included three or four weeks of running debate, and Gorman of Maryland was on
the floor in opposition a considerable period of that time. Senator Millard Tydings is well known as one of the outstanding foes of these current "Force Bills". Your other representatives in Congress - past and present - have similar records. It seems that Maryland people have shown a consistent preference for believers in American, states' rights, government, and I feel that they will show it again in November.

Q- Some people have been saying that your campaign will help defeat Truman, and help elect Dewey. What do you have to say about that?

A- I have this to say: such a statement is completely false, and it is sometimes deliberately made by those who know it to be false. President Truman has defeated himself by political maneuvering which lost him the confidence of the American people, especially the Democrats of the Southern states who always have been the backbone of the Democratic Party, and the margin of sure strength which gave the party its victories. He cannot blame me or anyone else but himself for his defeat. On the other hand, neither will we help Dewey. We will actually hurt him, for we will take many voters who, disgusted with Truman, would have gone to Dewey had there been no other choice. But Dewey will lose those votes because we are in the field. There might have been a number of Southern states in the Republican column in November had the race been run without the States' Rights Democrats. Now there will not be a single Southern state go Republican. We haven't hurt Harry Truman one bit, because he already was hopelessly lost. We have hurt Dewey plenty, perhaps enough to cost him the presidency he otherwise would have won.

Q- Do you think this will work out for the good of the country?

A- It is the best thing that could happen for America .. and the stronger vote States' Righters get, the healthier the political life of the nation will be.
Q- Explain that a little more.

A- It simply is this: Dewey, Truman, and Wallace all alike and equally strongly support a program of federal legislation which would overturn the American standard of values in government and individual rights. We Americans always have believed in and practiced the doctrine that men are better off and their liberties safer, the freer they are from government control. The system which contends that people are not able to govern themselves and need close supervision and regulation, even to their habits and practices of work and play, and need a strong centralized government to do that, is a system more akin to the totalitarian methods of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, than to the American faith upheld by Jefferson, Jackson, Cleveland and Wilson.

In other words, the trend toward a police state, which is embodied in the platforms of Wallace, Dewey and Truman, is not representative of the faith of the bulk of American people. That trend was engineered by subversive elements which have infiltrated those parties or exerted pressure on them. Without the States' Rights Democrats standing forth as the supporters of traditional American liberal governmental policies, the trend might not be stopped before we had gone so far that our liberties would be lost to an autocratic, powerful Washington government. States' Rights Democracy furnishes a rallying point for Americans who believe the type of government, which has proved successful for this country, should be retained.

Q- You spoke of subversive elements infiltrating or exerting pressure on the political parties. Just what did you mean by that?

A- Every person who keeps up with the news knows that our federal government has been penetrated by un-American communistic elements, and that they have had an amazing influence on political activities. The bloc voting, ignorant minorities
in a number of northern cities have been roped in by these radical agitators, and their votes dangled as bait before the professional political bosses. To get those votes, the bosses accepted platform planks approved and advocated by the communists but abhorred by the majority of Americans. But since the smoothly operated coup swept all three Philadelphia conventions, the Americans who opposed those planks were without any means of protesting, until the States' Rights Democratic ticket entered the field.

Q- What are some of those planks which you say are approved by the communists but not by the majority of Americans?

A- They are embodied in what President Truman called his "Civil Rights" program but which in actuality strike a blow at all individual rights.

One of the foremost of these is a proposed FEPC act. Pretending to outlaw discrimination in employment because of race, color, ancestry or religion, the act is essentially aimed at two goals: to abolish segregation in the South, and to establish a governmental power of control over people's individual lives and habits which would make a perfect channel of operation for politically ambitious persons to become a type of dictator in America.

This bill would establish a commission in Washington with thousands of federal agents in the field. It would give to them the power to continuously question, intimidate, and harass business men concerning their employment and promotion activities. Every job awarded and every promotion made would be subject to review by these agents. It is an absolute impossibility for those agents to read business men's minds and determine whether or not a particular act was prompted by a man's better judgment, be it good or bad, or whether prejudice entered into it. But these agents nevertheless, on the basis of their own opinion, would have the power to haul employers before boards, commissions and courts, hundreds
of miles from their home to be put through inquisitions lasting perhaps months. If a person so much as "impedes" or fails to "cooperate" with these federal agents, he is subject to fine and imprisonment.

The same kind of control is provided for labor unions. I am firmly convinced that a labor union or a labor movement can serve labor only as long as it is free from governmental control. Giving a commission in Washington a say-so in the selection of union members smacks of the methods by which Mussolini and Hitler enslaved labor while retaining a shell of a "labor front" movement.

And -- in addition to the apparent evil features of such a bill -- it is plainly not within the constitutional powers of the federal government to meddle in such individual rights as employment and membership standards.

Q- What are the other measures you oppose?
A- Two of them are the federal bills to give police powers to the federal government and interfere with the self-government of our communities in police matters. They call this the anti-lynching bill, but it is obviously a farce. The other measure would give the federal government a similar control over qualifications of voters, another subject which the constitution specifically said was within the province of the states.

Q- Do you believe that all the South is opposed to these measures?
A- Certainly. But it is not only all the South. A majority -- vast majority -- of all Americans. This is not a sectional fight. I wish you could see the mail we get from Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, and places all over the nation. We are not asking anything for the South -- we are asking that all the people of America be allowed to keep their rights to govern themselves in their own states and their own communities. We are asking that the American principle of self-government and individual freedom not be sacrificed for the European-totalitarian principle of
dictatorial government and regimentation of the individual.

Q- Do you believe that this situation, which you say you see, is realized by most people?

A- Unfortunately, most Americans are inclined to let politics take care of itself, and many of them had only a hazy idea of what these measures held in store for them. They were deceived by the glowing, humanitarian aims alleged for the measures. But they are beginning to realize that under the service was an insidious scheme which would have completely overthrown their way of life as they have known and liked it all their life.

Many of them know it now, but the number who do not know the details of the Truman-Dewey-Wallace "civil rights program" is too great.

I do feel, however, that if the Philadelphia conventions had been held six months earlier, and the States' Rights movement started six months earlier, we would have swept the elections throughout America.

Q- Do you feel that you have accomplished much in the short two months you have been campaigning?

A- Indeed, I do. We have lined up the Solid South, and we have awakened millions of people in the other states, most of them states where we are not even on the ballot.

Q- Governor, would it be asking too much to have you tell us something about yourself?

A- Well, I'll answer that in a short way: I was born in South Carolina 45 years ago; was a high school teacher, superintendent of education; lawyer; senator; judge; soldier during the past war, and now governor.

Q- I am told that you hold about 14 decorations from the United States and foreign governments, including the Purple Heart—f or wounds received during the Normandy
Beach invasion. Is that correct?
A- Yes.

(Announcer take it from here)