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States' Rights, 1948 October 6

Strom Thurmond

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

It is always a pleasure to me to visit the great Commonwealth of Virginia and to mingle with her people. We South Carolinians feel close to Virginia, because our affinity to your people has so many roots in tradition, in custom, in language, and in the great principles of American freedom.

We Thurmonds are proud of a Virginia ancestor, John Thurmond, my grandfather, George Washington Thurmond, who was named for a Virginian, served under General Lee and was with him at the surrender in Appomattox. Grandfather walked all the way home to Edgefield, S. C. after the surrender.

The State of Virginia is rich with the glory of those who founded the democratic tradition, and she is rich with its culmination in modern life. Her people today are still determined that the constitutional guarantees of American liberty shall never be sacrificed.

In considering the vast problems of our government and of our society today, I turn often to the experiences and the utterances of our common founding fathers. Their wisdom is the greatest heritage we have, and we cannot safely ignore the pattern for democracy they laid down.

In the days before Virginia became a free state, the liberty of the individual was nothing in most of the world — the state was all-powerful. Every man, woman, and child was to an unbelievable extent dependent on his king, or on some other kind of ruler, for every good thing of life. It they were allowed to own a home and be safe from unreasonable arrest, it was because their government granted that privilege. If they were allowed to own property, worship as they please, or conduct their private enterprises in their
own way, they did so only by sufferance of those in whom all power was vested.

But Americans changed all that. They set up governments in their own communities with power vested in the people, and from the small communities they extended the people's power upward to the county, to the state, and thence to the central government. Thus the people controlled their government.

In America the individual became supreme, for the first time in man's history.

That was, and is, the best system of law on earth. Under it, more freedom is possible than under any other. Our forefathers knew that they had established something good, and they fought to prevent a centralized government from taking the power away from the people.

In direct opposition to this great heritage of ours, is the system of the total state, in which the individual is nothing, in which he is an insignificant cog in the wheel of government. Individuality is destroyed, on the false theory that it is for the common good. That false theory has been repudiated in recent history with the great revelation that such a system can only result in placing total power in the hands of a very few greedy men.

That theory is still being used to gain power in Europe, and all the false claims that it serves the common good and promotes human rights are being used to spread the power of its advocates.

My friends, it is a frightening thing to realize that we in America today are threatened with an attempt to centralize power for political gain, in much the same manner by which power was centralized by Hitler and Stalin. It is a fearsome thing to know that the advocates of the total state in America are using the false slogans of human rights in an all-out effort to change our way of life and snatch the power of government away from the people.

And it is still more terrible to realize that the advocates of the centralized state have seized upon the platforms and upon the
candidates of three political parties in this country. To serve their evil designs, they have made a stooge out of Henry Wallace, a mouth-piece out of Harry Truman, and a puppet prince out of Tom Dewey.

This is enough to alarm any real American who has sense enough to know how and why his personal liberties are protected. It is particularly alarming to a true Democrat, a Democrat who is loyal to the principles of his Party.

But amid all the confusion of modern life, amid all the cares of a world struggling for peace, amid all the bewildering maze of bureaucratic government under which we live, the true loyalties of God-fearing, freedom-loving Americans remain as vibrant and alive as they were in 1787.

That is why I am here today. That is why I am proud to bear the standard of an organization which, alone among all political groups, has had the courage to voice the determination that the fundamental precepts of our democracy shall not be destroyed for political gain.

Truman, Dewey, and Wallace are all three committed to an unconstitutional and un-American program.

But within the few short weeks since these three candidates were nominated, millions of loyal Americans have demonstrated that they cannot and will not be forced to accept an unconstitutional doctrine.

By supporting the States' Rights Democrats, they are putting these three candidates on notice that their program is un-American, impractical, and impossible.

The States' Rights Democrats are loyal to the same democratic principles that characterized the life and the thinking of the immortal Virginian, Thomas Jefferson. It is our plan and our confident hope to expand the application of these Jeffersonian conceptions of government.

In no state have we interfered with local political affairs. In no state has our organization done anything to impede the progress
of Democratic Senators or Congressmen. The selection of these representatives of the people is as much a prerogative of the states as the matter of poll taxes, of the control of crime, and the regulation of social relationships.

Our fight is against the candidates of the three Philadelphia conventions, and against the political leaders who have debased our nation by sponsoring unconstitutional demands made by powerful minority groups.

Our fight is against all those who are willing to place the great office of President of the United States on the auction block.

And our campaign is based on a simple principle that any school child may understand — that if any Constitutional right is taken away from the people, it will not be long until someone will take away all our Constitutional rights.

My Friends, it is a great pity that there were no State's Rights Democrats in the Republic of Germany back in 1932. In that year the German people governed themselves, with a group of states much like our own, and with a Constitution very similar to ours.

But Adolf Hitler, posing as a champion of human rights, came along and stepped on one freedom after another until he alone had the power of government. He destroyed the rights of the German states and thus took away from the people their voice in the German government. He grabbed control of the ballot box — remember those 100-per cent plebiscites? He grabbed control of the police power, and before many years had passed, he had established himself as a supreme tyrant over the people.

We are loathe to believe that such a man could take over America. But even Hitler had to make the first step. Even Hitler had to drive the opening wedge so that the log could be split and the power of the people destroyed.
The States' Rights Democrats do exist in America. And they are dedicated to the proposition that the advocates of the total state shall not use the mis-named Civil Rights proposals as an opening wedge for the inroads of tyranny and oppression.

I would like to list for you some of the ways in which this unconstitutional program can become a precedent for the police state, and some of the effects it would have on our way of living.

The states have the constitutional right to establish voting qualifications. That right would be lost under the Anti-Poll Tax Bill, and federal control of elections would follow.

Our states have the exclusive right to the control of crime within their borders, through state courts. That right would go to the federal government under the Anti-Lynching Bill.

Our states have the right to make their own laws regarding social relationships, but that right would be taken by the federal government under the Anti-Segregation proposals.

The right to regulate business within the states would go to the federal government under the FEPC law.

And finally, by virtue of the wisdom of our forefathers, the states have the exclusive right to the control of the police power. That right would soon vanish if the federal police system proposed under the Civil Rights laws is put into effect.

It is difficult to believe that this wholesale invasion of our Constitutional liberties has been adopted by three candidates for President, merely to make a cheap appeal to a selfish minority group. Yet that is what we are confronted with today.

But, my friends, the States' Rights Democrats have enough faith in the American people to believe that they will not accept this onslaught on their liberties, to satisfy the greed of a minority faction!

We stand on the assertion that under the American form of government the rights of the states must be protected. As an illus-
tation, we declare that, if New York State wants laws that prevent separating the races, New York has that privilege. But we also say that if Virginia can solve her problems best by separating the races, that is the privilege of Virginia!

It is not, and it never will be, the prerogative of the federal government to force upon all the states the madcap theories of the crackpots, the reds and the pinks, and the political machines which employ those theories to maintain themselves in power.

Let us examine briefly the terrible effect of the so-called "Fair Employment Practices Act" promised by Truman, Dewey, and Wallace. There is nothing in the Constitution giving Congress power to impose this act, which would force a business man into involuntary servitude, because it would force him to employ persons unsuitable to his business. It would force a working man into involuntary servitude by forcing him to stay on the job with people he does not like, and to take into his labor unions those he wants to keep out.

This law is already in effect in certain states, including New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York. We do not deny the right of these states to adopt it if they wish. But let us study some provisions of the New York law to see how the federal law might work.

Under the New York law:
It is unlawful to ask a man who has changed his name what his name had been before.

It is unlawful to ask a man's birthplace, or the birthplace of his parents or his wife.

It is unlawful to ask an applicant for employment to show a birth certificate.

It is unlawful to ask a man's religious affiliations, and even to ask whether or not he is an atheist.

It is unlawful to tell an applicant that your firm observes certain holidays, and only such holidays -- such as the 4th of July, or Christmas, or Decoration Day.

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It is unlawful to inquire the complexion of an applicant, and it is even unlawful to ask him to attach a photograph of himself to the application.

It is unlawful to ask a man whether he is a naturalized or native-born citizen, or whether his parents were, and you cannot ask him for his naturalization papers.

And the worst provision of all — it is unlawful to inquire into the military experience of an applicant, or ask him where he was during World War I. He could have been in jail for evasion of the draft, or he could have been fighting our soldiers abroad — but you must not ask him about that.

Is that what you want in Virginia — in Maryland — in Kentucky — and all over this country?

Of course, these are rules and regulations of the New York Commission, but the federal law provides the same power to the federal Commission to set up similar rules and regulations, and to force them on the country.

Let me point out that Governor Dewey endorsed that law in New York, and now his platform promises to foist it upon every state of the nation.

I would ask Governor Dewey, and President Truman, and Mr. Wallace, whether they did not know that this FEPC is the main plank in the Communist platform, and that it is based on a law that helped to put Joe Stalin in power in Russia.

It is obvious that the Communists would use this law to force their agents and saboteurs into all the secret places of our defense program, including the atomic laboratories.

My friends, I have said this before, and I say it again now:

The American people are not going to furnish to our Communist enemies a ready-made weapon for our own destruction!

We who have continued to raise our voices against this un-American doctrine had hoped that, through the agency of the great
National Democratic Party, we might deal it a crushing blow. But at Philadelphia we saw that our Party leaders had sold themselves down the river to this Russian program. We saw that the national leadership of the Democratic Party had committed itself to selling out our rights for base political gain.

But we were steadfast in the conviction that a way could be found for the American people to voice their opposition to those false leaders, and the thousands of supporters who are joining us every day have proved that the States' Rights Democrats will accomplish their goals, whatever the results of this election may be.

We shall repudiate those leaders. We shall cast them out and strip them of their power.

We shall purify the Democratic Party and restore it to the principles for which it has stood more than a century.

Without fail, we shall stop the misnamed Civil Rights proposals of Truman, Dewey, and Wallace, and prevent the invasion of local self-government and the usurpation of the Constitutional rights of states.

I am convinced that the good people of Virginia are with us. I know that the people of Virginia will not yield to the greed of the politicians.

It is my happy pleasure to report that our movement is gaining strength by the hour in every state in which the people have a chance to be heard. Our cause will be represented by more than 100 electoral votes. If we can thus prevent any candidate from getting a majority of votes in the Electoral College, our chances will be good in the House of Representatives. A new House must choose a President from among the three highest, and the smaller states will have a balance of power which will enable them to elect a President suitable to them.

There are those who have criticized our movement from the beginning, but it cannot be said that any of that criticism comes from anyone who can successfully challenge the principles upon which
we stand. All those who revile us do so on false grounds of political expediency. They would have you believe that Americans vote for selfish political gains, and not for principle. The States' Rights Democrats hold to the belief that a good American will vote his convictions.

That is the kind of vote we will receive — a vote for real Americanism and for representative democracy.

My friends, there is no way of straddling the fence on this issue. A vote for Dewey, or Truman, or Wallace, is a vote for the FEPC law and for anti-segregation. A vote for either of these candidates is a vote for the police state and for the death of personal liberty.

The way is clear. Let us march together toward that supreme goal of prosperity and happiness for all envisioned by our forefathers, when they made the blessings of liberty secure in the Constitution.

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