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States' Rights, 1948 October 11

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS OF J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND STATE'S RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AT LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA, OCTOBER 11, 1948.

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

As a candidate for President from the South, I have found a new faith in our undertaking during the past week in an extended visit to Virginia. I am happy to be with you here in Lynchburg, and on the soil of Virginia—"the mother of states" and "the mother of Presidents."

There is no state in this nation more closely aligned with the everlasting principles of the sovereignty of states upon which our democracy rests. The story of the great Commonwealth of Virginia is a story of living devotion to the cause of representative government by free men.

The great men of Virginia's early days were giants of moral intellect. Their brilliant thinking on methods by which man may govern himself without fear of tyranny is deeply reflected in our lives. They created for us a new kind of democracy under which government was kept close to the people, by means of a balance of power between the states and the central government.

But the brilliant men of early days have been succeeded by men of smaller calibre. The political leaders of the United States today either do not know how and why our democracy was made possible, or they have lost faith in it. For they have allowed the fundamental precepts of our Constitutional government to be jeopardized. They have countenanced, and in fact endorsed, a wholesale attack upon the sovereignty of states, concerning which they propose that the people shall have no vote.

It is an astounding fact that three candidates for the great office of President of the United States have sponsored a program which would deny the rights of the states to manage their own internal affairs. For the first time in American history, the political platforms of both the Republican and the Democratic parties have promised the people to violate the United States Constitution.

But the shameful thing about it, is that the three candidates—Truman, Dewey, and Wallace—have made these promises in a cheap bid for the bloc votes of a racial minority. They have offered to violate the Constitution in answer to the threats and demands of a minority bloc machine.
which claims to be able to swing the election in doubtful states.

Thus we see the office of President being placed on the auction block while the political leaders of the major parties bid against each other for the favors of a minority Machine which cares nothing for the preservation of the democratic way of life.

My friends, are we to have government by minority machines in this country?

It is time for the American people to learn of this political pressure system, which nullifies their individual votes.

It is time for the great rank and file of the membership of our major political parties to demand of their leaders that the Constitution be respected. It is time for the people to rise up against the unconstitutional dictates of small minorities which swing back and forth from one party to another, in exchange for special favors.

Yes, the time has arrived, and the thinking people of this country are meeting the challenge. They are meeting it through the ever-growing voice of the States' Rights Democrats:

We are going to put the politicians on notice that they must not invade the United States Constitution, in a cheap effort to squeeze and satisfy a minority faction!

We stand upon the assertion that the freedom of the individual American rests upon the rights of the states to manage their own internal affairs. We are firm in the belief that if the sovereignty of the states is destroyed, the liberty of the individual will perish. All our history bears out that belief. All our traditions and customs are predicated upon it.

Those who belittle the principle of state sovereignty do so for one of two reasons: either they are not big enough to know its importance, or they are willing to destroy it for selfish ends.

When you consider the candidacies of Truman, Dewey, and Wallace—all of whom belittle this principle—you may decide for yourselves whether they do so out of ignorance or out of selfish ambition.

There are those who criticize the undertaking of the States' Rights Democrats, on the grounds that ours is a narrow, sectional fight based on race prejudice. We have repeatedly shown the untruth of this assertion. We have repeatedly declared that our determination to
oppose the so-called Civil Rights program, has come from a loyalty to the principle of the rights of states.

It is true that the enactment of the measures endorsed by Truman, Dewey and Wallace would utterly destroy our way of life in the South. But it is equally true that those measures would destroy the way of life of every American.

When you invade and violate the Constitution, you attack the personal liberties of the citizens of California and Maine, as well as the liberties of the people of South Carolina and Virginia.

You cannot create new rights for one group by taking them away from another. If you destroy the basic guarantees of individual freedom laid down in the Constitution, all men suffer. Regardless of what our critics say, the only safeguard of human rights is the preservation of the Constitution in all its vigor and meaning.

That is the position of the States' Rights Democrats. And I say to you with all my heart, that it is also the faith and the conviction of the American people.

My friends, the minorities who use their bloc vote in an effort to gain their ends in violation of the Constitution, should realize that they are destroying the very instrument by which their rights are guaranteed. I appeal to such minorities everywhere to realize, that when they allow their votes to be grouped and herded together by scheming politicians in this way, they are endangering their own rights.

Recent history has taught us that dictators rise to power by undermining constitutional rights. Hitler destroyed the constitution of the German Republic within a few years' time. If he had not, he never could have risen to power. He broke down state lines, nullified state legislatures, took over state courts, and centered all the power of government in Berlin.

And let me remind our own people, that when Hitler had accomplished these things, the first group of people to suffer were the racial minorities.

I repeat — the United States Constitution is the only safe guarantee of human rights for all men, of whatever faith, whatever color, and whatever economic condition.

Let us look again at the recent history of Europe. In the European states which have been prostrated to the will of a dictator, the people have been fooled time and time again by the use of false slogans for
evil ends. The false doctrines of all dictators have been filled with promises concerning human rights. Those promises have been used by Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler to fool the people into giving up their control of government.

Stalin wrote an FEPC law in 1920. The American version, in fact, was copied from it, as anyone may learn who cares to read the Russian Constitution. Stalin used his FEPC law, not to guarantee human rights as he promised, but to get control of industry, and thus to fasten his iron grip on the economy of the Russian people.

Here in America we do not believe there is anything to be gained by following the example of Russia. We have common sense enough to know -- even if our political leaders do not -- that the people must retain the control of the ballot box, the control of industry, the control of social institutions and customs, and the control of the police powers.

We do not propose to yield this control to an all-powerful government on the banks of the Potomac, and thus to pave the way for a dictatorship in America.

The States' Rights Democrats oppose centralization of power in Washington, and because of it, we are under attack from the powerful propaganda machines of our opponents. They seek to fool the people concerning our purpose. The newsreels say, time and again, "Thurmond attacks Civil Rights." Or "Governor Wright denounces Civil Rights." Thus, they are trying to make you believe that Governor Wright and I are against human rights.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We believe in progress and prosperity for all men, regardless of color. But we also believe that such progress can be made in this country only by preserving the Constitutional guarantees that protect all races of men.

We believe that any state, of itself and by itself, has the Constitutional right to enact a Civil Rights program such as has been proposed. We defend, support, and protect the rights of any state to do so. But we are equally determined to oppose the enactment of such a program by the federal government in violation of the Constitution, and against the will of the individual states.

Ladies and gentlemen, the people of the states must retain their right to regulate elections and establish voting qualifications. If
they do not, any powerful President may at any time take control of your ballot boxes and run your elections to suit himself.

Yet we are asked to accept an Anti-Poll Tax law, giving Congress an unconstitutional precedent leading to the control of our suffrage.

The people of the states must retain control of their state courts and the prosecution of crimes within the states.

Yet we are asked to accept an anti-lynching law, which would permit Congress for the first time, without a Constitutional amendment, to invade the field of courts and laws within the states.

The people of the states must retain the right to regulate human relationships within their borders. If they do not, the customs by which they live may be destroyed, their law enforcement threatened, and their peace and harmony shattered.

Yet we are asked to accept Anti-Segregation Laws which have been found to be impractical and impossible in the South, and to give the President the right to force us into lawlessness and racial discord.

The people of the states must retain their right to regulate business within the states. Else they will open the doors to industrial control by the central government, such as Stalin has in Russia.

Yet we are asked to accept a so-called Fair Employment Practices Act, which would give government bureaus virtual dictatorship over business.

And finally, the people of the states must control their power over local police. If they do not, they will provide a national police system which any would-be dictator might use to terrorize the people into submission.

Yet we are asked to accept a national police system for the enforcement of these measures—a gestapo which would spread its tentacles into every county and every community in this nation.

There can be no question in the mind of any loyal American but that such a program is communistic at its roots, and that it is the most dangerous invasion of human rights ever attempted in this country.

And the States' Rights Democrats are saying to Truman, Dewey and Wallace, that the people of America will not endorse such a wholesale invasion of their rights, to help any men get elected!
Time does not permit me to go into all of these proposals with you as I would prefer to do. But I cannot fail to remind you of the great dangers to this country of one of them—the so-called FEPC Bill.

Dewey has already established this law in New York, under the privilege of that state to manage its own affairs. Warren has sought to enact it in California, but his people rejected it overwhelmingly, which is their privilege. Truman and Wallace are demanding the right to enforce it by federal fiat on California anyhow, and on Virginia and every other state. Let us therefore take a close look at it.

Under this bill a federal commission is given the right to force a businessman to hire persons unsuitable to his business, and the right to force a working man to associate with persons not of his choice. The Commission is given authority to set up its own rules and regulations. Now, we cannot be sure what those rules would be, but we may take a lesson from Dewey's New York law.

In New York it is unlawful for an employer to ask an applicant for a job these things:

What his former name was, in case he is using an alias now; where he was born, or to show his birth certificate; what his religion is; what his complexion is; or to attach a photograph if applying by mail; whether he is a native American, or that he produce naturalization papers.

And worst of all, in New York you cannot question a man as to his military experience, or ask him where he was in World War I. If he happened to be a draft dodger or an enemy soldier—too bad. Dewey's law won't let you ask him.

How these are New York regulations. But remember, they were written by the New York Commission in carrying out its law. And if our recent experience with the make-up of Washington commissions of this kind means anything, we know exceedingly well that the same kind of rules would be enforced on the nation under Senate Bill S-984—the FEPC of Truman, Dewey, and Wallace.

Let me ask you to remember that the wording of this bill was taken from Stalin's All-Races Law. When you realize that, you know full well that the Communists would give their eye teeth to have us accept it. By using it like Stalin did, they could force their agents into all the secret pieces of our defense program.
Whatever my critics may say, I will not be moved from the assertion that the FEPC bill is communistic at its base, and that it will not work in a free America.

My fellow Americans, we must face the realization that this vicious program was adopted, not only by the Dewey-Republicans and the Wallace-Progressives, but by the great Democratic Party.

At Philadelphia just three months ago the radicals and the crackpots, led by Hubert Humphries, joined up with the machine politicians, led by Howard McGrath, to adopt this program as a means of selling out to the minorities. Thus the great Democratic Party was kidnapped by its false leaders and carried off down the road to violation of the Constitution.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the parlor pinks and the subversives did not destroy the real Democratic Party. They snatched away the political framework—yes. They sold the good name of the Democratic Party down the river.

But they did not, and they cannot, steal away the great principles of loyalty to representative democracy for which that party has stood like a rock for more than a century.

The States' Rights Democrats are standing on that rock of loyalty to American principles, and, like the tree that is planted by the waters, we shall not be moved!

No, my friends, we are not leaving the Party. We are saving the Party for its ideals, and thereby, we are preserving the safety and security of this country. When this election is over -- when the Reds and the machine bosses are through vilifying us and denouncing us -- we shall have saved the Democratic Party for its traditions.

How foolish and vain of them to say that we are helping Dewey—Dewey, who showed his contempt for the South by working to defeat our efforts to win equal freight rates from the Northern industrialists who want to keep us down. Dewey, who promises to pass force bills uprooting our way of life.

No, if we had wanted to help the Republicans we should have stayed out of this fight, for Dewey could have carried several States in the South had we not come into the picture. Instead of that, we are saving the South for the Democratic Party.
And in doing so, we shall restore the South to her proper position of respect in the political life of the nation, so that never again shall our votes be held in contempt.

We ask you to join us in bringing about a rebirth of the Democratic Party. We ask you to join us in casting out forever the evil influences of those who would use its great name to debase the rights of individual Americans, and to destroy the sovereignty of states.

We invite you to join us in taking advantage of our Constitutional rights in the Electoral College, where we may prevent either of these petty candidates for President from winning a majority vote, and thus winning a mandate from the people to enact the Civil Rights force bills. We are firm in the conviction that if this election is decided by the House of Representatives, where our votes will hold the balance, that the President finally named will uphold and protect our Constitutional guarantees.

Whatever comes, we shall re-establish and strengthen the rights of states to manage their own internal affairs, and repudiate forever those who would lead us down the road to centralization of power and to the police state.