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States' Rights, 1948 October 12

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS OF J. STRON THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AT LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, OCTOBER 12, 1948

It is always a privilege and a pleasure to visit the great state of Kentucky. The very name of Kentucky is associated with all that is desirable in the American way of life. Your beautiful, rolling, Blue Grass country and your hills and valleys impart a special kind of charm that is distinctly American. I think everyone must say to himself that some day, somehow, I want to go to Kentucky.

I am especially happy to have the opportunity to address an audience in this charming old town which is so widely known as a center of learning. I know that many of you here are deeply concerned with the vast problems of our expanding nation, and with the need for a return to the fundamentals of representative democracy that is so evident today.

In the political contest in which we are engaged the basic issues which are of fundamental importance to every American are being obscured. There is a great cry for "human rights" -- for "Civil Rights" -- a cry which is serving the purposes of selfish groups, and which is threatening to obscure, by its noisy clamor, the need for constant reaffirmation of our basic principles of government.

The political leaders of our nation, in both major parties, have yielded to the temptation to forget our great underlying principles of democracy, in order to bid for the votes of a minority bloc. Our fight -- the fight of the States' Rights Democrats -- is therefore an effort to reaffirm the basis of representative government which protects our way of life. It is a fight to repudiate those who would sell out those principles in order to win an election.

We Americans have earned a high place in history because we have always been steadfast in the belief that freedom for the individual man means the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. Yet we are in danger today of exchanging that freedom for a kind of slavery which will nullify our liberties.

Freedom or slavery? Am I guilty of exaggeration? Can it be true that there are in America today forces which are dedicated to the destruction of personal freedom in this country?

Let us turn to the pages of history to answer that question.

The governments of ancient days were all highly centralized. No man had inherent rights, since no law was higher than that of the king.
With the founding of our Republic in 1776, there was begun the great experi-
ment of a society where there was a government of laws, and not of men; a government
with a written constitution, sharply limiting the powers of the bureaucracy, either
executive, legislative, or judicial; a government in which, for the first time in
history, there was a force stronger than the men in control, a force of law which
the rulers must obey.

The men who founded this country had experience with the governments of
Europe. They knew that men hunger for power. They knew that without the restraints
of law, fraud and chicanery, corruption and crime, take the place of justice and
reason in the administration of government. They knew they could not trust men in
power without eternal vigilance, lest these men use the great power of government
to destroy freedom itself.

When they formed the central government, they were careful to safeguard their
newly-won liberties against that government. They surrendered the questions of
foreign policy, the military defense, and the right to coin money. But they great-
ly limited the powers of the central government, and they adopted the Tenth Amend-
ment, which said:

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor pro-
hibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states, respectively, or to the
people."

There were a few who wanted a powerful, centralized government, who believ-
ed, indeed in a monarchy. They doubted the wisdom of any people to govern them-
selves. And since that time there has been continuous warfare between those who
sought an all-powerful government at Washington, and those who feared too much power
in the hands of unscrupulous men.

The national Democratic Party, from its inception, stood for personal free-
dom, and against the police state. It is the party of local self-government. It
is the party that recognized local control of the police force, the city and county
governments, the conduct of local business, and all the myriad affairs of daily life.
It was the party which recognized the right to choose your vocation and change your
job, to guide the education of your children, to attend the church of your choice,
to work with whom you please, and go where you choose.

But political greed came into the picture.

To secure the Negro vote in the doubtful states, Truman appointed a stacked
committee, composed of people who could be trusted to bring in a report expressing
radical views. After a pretense of consideration it brought in a document called
"The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights". This report was sent to Truman to Congress. He endorsed it, accepted it, sent it broadcast over the land as expressing his views, and the views of the leaders of organized Democracy.

Let's go back a little, find where this report originated, why it was made, why it expresses the heart of this new movement, so dangerous to our way of life, so dangerous to the liberties of us all.

Back in 1865, contrary to the thinking of Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Johnson, there was adopted by a Republican Congress, a series of so-called "force bills", the purpose of which was to remake the South, and build a Republican stronghold of the southern states. On the contrary, these force bills caused the South to become solidly Democratic, and it has remained so ever since.

For many years the vote of the Negro was not worth striving for, by either party. The situation in the South made trading for his influence impossible.

Gradually this situation changed. Determined to retain power by influencing the radical city political machines in the North, some party leaders became convinced that there was a chance of capturing the Negro vote. This vote had been strengthened by Negro migration to the North where it became a dominant factor in ward politics.

The Northern Democratic Party bought these new votes. It bought them for a dime a dozen. It paid for them on the barrel head, bartering away the heritage of free America. And it created a machine for the destruction of freedom in this country.

The Northern faction of the Democratic Party had begun to depend on widely divergent groups for its support. The "solid South" was "in the bag". But the radical fringes in the North had to be wooed and won.

And so came the Philadelphia conventions with both major parties bidding for minority votes. Let's analyze those conventions from the point of view of Kentucky, from the point of view of the average American who wants to live his own life, raise his own children in freedom, attend the church of his choice, work with whom he chooses to work, attend the lodge of his choice, whether it be the Masons or the Knights of Columbus.

First came the Republican convention. At that meeting it was decided to deny the business man his choice of those whom he was to employ. It was decided that the working man was no longer to have the right to say who could belong to his union, and who could work with him. Read the FEPC plank in the platform of the Republican Party, and then read the REFC bill it has endorsed, and you will see the danger it offers to our liberties.
And then came the convention of the Democratic Party - which had been the party of the liberals, the party of the average American, and the party of the working man. You saw the Democratic Party in Philadelphia adopt the FEPC, and you saw it join with those who would make freedom a mockery in this country.

Then came the fitting climax. You saw the Russian Party -- the so-called Progressive Party of Henry Wallace -- poor, helpless tool of Russia, take over the mantle of liberalism, advocate the anti-lynching bill, the anti-poll tax bill, the FEPC, and other baits for the minorities.

You observed these three parties vying with each other for the votes of a selfish group, and at the same time championing, in effect, the police state in America.

The States' Rights Democrats oppose such political treachery. We will not remain silent while the principles of American Democracy are perverted, violated, and destroyed.

Until the higher leadership of our political parties, of whatever name, become convinced that the American people are not lazy enough and not stupid enough to permit this kind of political bargaining, our liberties will be in danger. Until we can restore in this country the type of leadership it had in 1787, we cannot be certain that our democratic rights will be protected.

The fact that three Presidential candidates today have endorsed an unconstitutional program is enough to delight every Red and every Fellow Traveler on the globe.

The Reds will applaud if the Anti-Poll Tax Bill is passed, because they know it will usurp the right of the states to establish voting qualifications.

They will dance a jig of joy if the Anti-Lynching Bill goes through the Congress, because they know it will mean that the central Federal Government is taking over functions of state courts and state legislatures that now have the exclusive right to deal with crimes occurring within the states.

The Reds will be especially happy if the Anti-Segregation proposals are forced upon the South, for they have long ago chosen the South as a section for stirring up the kind of racial discord that will serve their evil purposes.

And how pleased the Communists would be to find the FEPC bill forced on this country. They know that Stalin used a bill almost exactly like the American version to lift himself to power back in 1920. And they know that this law would set a terrible precedent by which the federal government could seize the right to regulate private business and private employment within the states.
Perhaps the Communists would like best of all the enforcement features of these proposals, which would require a national police force that would usurp the functions of local police and sheriffs. It is by means of a national police force that Stalin keeps himself in power.

A careful study of the so-called Fair Employment Practices Act shows very clearly how the Communists would use this law to place their agents and saboteurs into the secret places of our national defense program, including our atomic laboratories. While the FEPC pretends to give employment opportunities to Negroes and other racial groups, it actually provides a slick method by which any Communist could get a job in any munitions plant he chose.

The FEPC bill -- Senate Bill S. 984 -- gives the Commission authority to make its own rules and regulations as to what is unlawful in hiring employees. To get an idea of what those rules will be, let us examine some of the unlawful acts set up by the FEPC in New York, where Tom Dewey already has it in effect.

Under the New York law it is unlawful for an employer to ask an applicant the following questions:

What his former name was if he had changed it.
Where he was born, and where his parents were born.
Whether he has a birth certificate.
What religious denomination he belongs to.
Whether he will follow the rules of the employer in observing only certain holidays -- such as the 4th of July or Christmas Day.
What his complexion is, or even to produce a photograph, if he should apply in writing.
Whether he is a naturalized or a native-born citizen, or that he produce his naturalization papers.
Where his family lives, or where they came from.

And here is one requirement of the New York Law that I wish every veteran in America could read. It is unlawful to ask an applicant for employment what his military experience is, or where he was during World War I. He might have been a draft-dodger, or he might have been shooting at our boys overseas, but you're not allowed to ask him about that.

Not only are the employers required to follow this communistic law, but the working man himself is forced to comply. Under the proposed national FEPC, an employee who refuses to work at a bench or a loom beside someone he does not like is subject to fine and imprisonment.
Does this sound like an American concept to you? It is perfectly obvious that this law -- which is the first plank in the platform of the Communists would be used by them to aid their designs upon our national security.

Yet this unconstitutional and un-American proposal is an iron-clad platform promise made by Harry Truman, Tom Dewey, and Henry Wallace.

Only the States' Rights Democrats -- and we alone -- have the moral courage to stand up to the Communists and tell them this foreign doctrine will not work in free America!

I hope you good people of Kentucky will remember that the vicious FEPC is not only endorsed by Truman and Wallace, but by Tom Dewey and Earl Warren. Dewey claims credit for its adoption in New York -- where the people never voted on it. Warren tried to force it on California -- where the people did vote and rejected it.

I uphold their right to sponsor this law in their own states, if the people of those states want it.

But I stand on the assertion that Truman, Dewey, and Wallace have no right to force this Communistic law upon all the states of this nation!

There are those who would discredit the effort of the States' Rights Democrats by saying that we needn't worry about those platform promises. We are told that they are merely "political propaganda," and that there is no danger they will be passed, and the principle of state sovereignty destroyed.

To those who talk that kind of nonsense, we have only to point out that the efforts of the Southern senators and congressmen to prevent the passage of such bills has been harder each time they came up in Congress. We have only to remember that the effort to pass these force bills grows stronger with every session of Congress. We point out, too, that one of the candidates for Vice President used his privilege in the Congress at one point to have seven Southern senators "arrested" by the Senate sergeant-at-arms. He had them brought back and forced them to consider the anti-poll tax bill.

Of course they are going to carry out these promises if the American people do not protest. But I personally believe the people will offer the strongest protest ever heard in an election!

The States' Rights Democrats offer real Americans the opportunity to resist this threat to our safety. There is no other way of opposing it in this election. Because we have offered the only means by which your ballots can count against this program, we have been accused of various subtle intentions -- among them, the falsehood that we are helping the Republicans.
Nothing could be more ridiculous. All of you know, that if our ticket had not been placed in the field, a huge number of Southerners would have voted for Dewey, out of opposition to Truman. Those votes are coming to us now, where they can accomplish something.

I do not believe the Republicans will carry a single Southern state, simply because the States' Rights Democrats are taking those states from him. We are keeping them for the true, historic principles of the Democratic Party.

The South cannot gain a thing by voting for Governor Dewey. I will mention just one reason. You know very well that the South has struggled for years under freight rates set up so high that we could not bring in industry to compete with the East. When the Southern Governors finally won a victory over this unjust treatment, it was over the opposition of Dewey. He publicly admitted that he was an enemy of the South, by fighting to retain freight rates which kept us in the chains of economic slavery.

I do not see how such a candidate can afford to lay claim to a single vote in the Southland!

Ladies and gentlemen of Kentucky, we are asking you to join us in a movement which will mean the rebirth of the once-great Democratic Party. We ask you to help us reclaim that Party from its false leaders, and to restore it to the great principles for which it has stood for a century.

We ask you to join us in restoring the Southland to a position of political respect, so that never again will any Presidential candidate ignore our needs because he thinks we are "in the bag".

There is a good possibility that we may accomplish these things by preventing any candidate from winning a majority of the electoral votes. If we do, our chances will be good when the election is decided by the House of Representatives.

But whatever comes, we shall have crystallized American sentiment against the invasion of our Constitutional rights. We shall have confounded and defeated the agents of the total state. We shall have demonstrated to the selfish leaders of minority blocs that it is not profitable to traffic with American liberties. And we shall have gained for the South her American right to solve her own problems in her own way, under the Constitution she is bound to protect.

Our agency is the ballot box — the vote of our people — the most sacred privilege we have, and the only one by which our liberty can be preserved. And by that vote our united voices will protect and uphold the immortal principle of the sovereignty of states and the everlasting rights of the individual man.