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States' Rights, 1948 October 13

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS OF
J. STROM THURMOND
GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA
and
CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

AT
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, OCT. 13, 1948

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

It has been my pleasure to meet thousands of Kentuckians during the past several days, in the course of one of the most enjoyable visits I have made to any state. I am glad now to be privileged to visit the beautiful City of Louisville, known the world over for its charm and distinction.

I am told that politics never takes a vacation in Kentucky, and I believe that must be because of the fact that Kentuckians, like all good Americans, cherish the privilege of the ballot. Kentucky's history, from the time when the Kentucky Resolutions first declared the indestructible rights of states, has been a long record of devotion to the democratic principles of constitutional government.

We live in an age when the right of suffrage may have a more important influence on the future of our Republic than at any time in our history. Human freedom of thought and freedom of action are at stake all over the world. They are no less at stake here in this country, although the influences that threaten our freedom are hidden beneath a surface political clamor designed to obscure them.

We Americans have been too prone to boast of our democracy, and too slow to protect it. We are quick to defend our principles in war, but in peace we often let them go untended. Let us recall now, in a time of peace, that complacency may be a dangerous enemy of democracy.

All real Americans love politics. They love the hue and cry of a political year, the choice of issues, the drawing of lines between factions—all the explosive pomp and circumstance of an election.

But too often we have been inclined to marvel at a display of political fireworks in the sky, while the flames of corruption spread along the ground underneath. Too often we have concentrated on the machinery of getting votes at the expense of the issues involved.

Our great political parties have become vast vote-getting organizations led by men who care little or nothing about the ideals upon which our democracy is founded. Those who place devotion to country above the desire for political power, are forced by these leaders to sacrifice their ideals for the sake of votes.

In this political year we have seen the ultimate depth reached in the
debasement of principle to political greed. We have seen the unconstitutional
demands of a selfish minority group take over completely. We have seen the politi-
cal bosses yield to those unconstitutional demands because they came from persons
who claimed to be able to swing elections in doubtful states.

The pygmies of politics are trying to force upon us a government by
minority.

The pygmies of politics have announced their willingness to invade the
basic rights of the Constitution to gain power for themselves. And in their greed
they would permit this great Republic to be carried along on the red tide of fears,
tears, and blood, to be washed up at last on the rocky shores of the total state.

My fellow Americans, I cannot believe that the people of this country
will yield to such a debasement of their rights for political gain. I am not
convinced that we have become so cynical and so careless that we will remain silent
and submissive while our democracy drifts headlong toward the centralized state.

I am here before you today, because I believe the American people are
going to rise up and resist this effort to trade away our form of government to
make a cheap political bargain.

After the National Democratic Party had met at Philadelphia and repudia-
ted the rights of states in favor of an unconstitutional program, it became quite
clear that Americans who opposed this invasion of their rights had no way of
expressing their opposition at the ballot box.

Truman, Dewey, and Wallace were exactly alike in the fact that all three
had espoused the most wholesale assault on our form of government ever devised.
It was evident that a vote for either of these candidates would be a vote for a
centralized, all-powerful state.

But those of us who had resisted this shameful betrayal of American
principles from its beginning, did not consider Philadelphia a final defeat. We
knew the strength and power of the people's opposition to the Truman-Dewey-
Wallace program. We knew that there was strong support for our cause in every
state in the Union.

That support came from the grass roots of the country. It came from
the people who live democracy, not from those who live on it.

And so the States' Rights Democrats came into being as a spontaneous
voice of the people — a voice which within a few short weeks has carried our
cause into every corner of America.

The voice of the States' Rights Democrats is putting the politicians
on notice that the Constitution of the United States must be preserved to the
letter.
The American people met their first great challenge under Washington when they won their independence. They met their second challenge almost immediately afterward, when they devised a government which, for the first time in world history, protected the rights of the individual man. They did so with a simple, understandable document, written in the plain words of law — the United States Constitution.

The challenge that confronts the American people today is a greater one still — the moral leadership of a war-torn, disillusioned, weary world.

It is wise to ask ourselves why the whole world turns to America today for the solution of the vast problems of human survival. Is it because of our military strength? Is it because of our huge industrial development? Is it because we are so rich?

No. The little people of the world do not turn their faces toward this continent because of any of these things. They do not cast longing glances toward the United States because of our military and economic strength.

The war-weary people of this earth have faith in America because we have demonstrated that mankind can find a way of governing himself so that the personal freedom of the individual will be preserved.

We are called upon for moral leadership today because our form of government is a perpetual guarantee against the seizure of power by tyrants. Those who turn to us now are the miserable victims of dictators who have taken all power unto themselves. They want an assurance that mankind is not drifting into a morass of totalitarian hopelessness, in which all men are slaves to the will of a few.

If we would meet that challenge, we must renew our faith in the principles of democracy which have made us the moral leaders of the world. We must remember that our progress as a people has been possible only because the kind of government we established has been successful.

That form of government is a perpetual bulwark against the tyranny of a centralized state. The system of checks and balances laid down by the Constitution in its division of powers between the states and the federal government, makes it impossible for a dictator to rise to power over us. The rights of states to manage their own internal affairs guarantee the personal rights of the individual.

We know, therefore, that we must maintain that system of checks and balances at all costs, if our freedoms are to be preserved.

But the central idea of the freedom of the individual man under God has been in eclipse in this country in recent years. Faith in that idea as
expressed in the Constitution has been wearing thin. The American people, dazzled by the glittering satisfactions of outer luxury, have permitted themselves to forget the way in which they have won that luxury.

In recent months, our people have permitted themselves to be fooled by a shallow political assault upon the checks and balances of government. They have come dangerously close to letting that assault pass unchallenged.

The paramount question in this election, therefore, is not what Truman, Dewey, and Wallace would have you believe. It is not whether we should change this word or that word in the labor laws. It is not whether Uncle Sam should build this kind of housing project or the other. It is not whether the government should reorganize this or that department.

These matters are of great importance. But they are trivial by comparison with the real issue.

The paramount question, my friends, is whether we Americans can put our own house of democracy in order so that we may lead the world out of its despair.

We must restore our faith in our ability to rule and govern ourselves. We must rid ourselves of the regimentation that is slowly making us slaves of Washington. We must learn to look every Washington gift horse in the mouth, and examine it for Communistic glanders. We must challenge every subtle attack upon our Constitution, no matter what name it has used for a disguise. And we must look the disgruntled minorities in the face and tell them that the Presidency of the United States is not for sale.

The campaign of the States' Rights Democrats has had many critics. We have been reviled and abused on many grounds. Most of that opposition has come from those who have always argued for the concentration of more and more power on the Potomac.

You may have noticed that the candidates of the Republican Party and of the National Democratic Party are making a desperate effort to ignore us. They are strangely silent on the issue we have raised. They refuse to discuss it, even on direct challenge. They offer no public defense of the Civil Rights program by which they have promised to violate the Constitution to please the minority bloc. The reason is quite plain.

Tom Dewey and Harry Truman and their running mates will not speak out, because they know that their promises to invade the Constitution cannot be justified on any grounds!

These three candidates have yielded to the demands of the parlor pinks and the subversives, backed up by the offer of the votes of a racial minority. They have all three endorsed a platform which would open the doors to eventual
communistic control of this Republic.

Even the most casual study of the so-called Civil Rights program reveals the brassy hypocrisies it attempts to conceal under the delusion that it seeks to confer human rights upon our people.

A move to gain control of elections within the states is disguised by a so-called Anti-Poll Tax Bill.

A precedent for gaining federal power over state laws and state courts is hidden beneath the pretense of the Anti-Lynching Bill.

A move to build federal power over the relationship between one man and another on the social level is disguised under the Anti-Segregation proposals.

A precedent for the eventual control of business by Washington is concealed in the pretense of the Fair Employment Practices Commission.

And a dangerous precedent leading to the establishment of a Federal Gestapo is hidden beneath the promise that a national police system will be established to enforce these proposals.

By using these laws as his tools, a dictator could within a few years break down our state lines, nullify our state legislatures, take over our elections and our police and establish his tyranny over our people. Anyone who doubts my words may read the story of the rise of Adolph Hitler and be convinced.

It is a sad commentary upon the type of political leadership we have in America today, when we realize that Truman, Dewey, and Wallace have all promised to enforce the F.E.P.C. — a piece of legislation which would not only violate the Constitution but which utterly change our way of life.

Governor Dewey has forced the F.E.P.C. on New York. That is his privilege, under the right of any state to govern itself. But let us look at his New York law to see what he now proposes to force on the whole nation.

Under Dewey's law it is unlawful to ask an applicant: where he was born, or to show naturalization papers or a birth certificate; what his religion is, or even whether he is an atheist; what his complexion is, or to produce a photograph if he applies in writing; and — worst of all — you cannot ask a man for his military record, or where he was during World War I, to find out whether he was an enemy soldier or what.

Such regulations are in effect now in New York. And under the bill endorsed by Truman, Dewey, and Wallace, a Federal Commission would be given power to set up exactly the same regulations.

I say to you that it is un-American to force a man to employ persons unsuitable to his business. I assert that it is involuntary servitude to force a worker to associate on the job and in labor unions with persons not of his choice.
That is the way of Communism. And it is the way the Communists will use to undermine our industries and to learn all our defense secrets. Truman, Dewey, and Wallace should be informed that their proposed F.E.P.C. would open the floodgates of Communism in America.

In ever-increasing numbers, the States' Rights Democrats are rising up to say that we will not permit the American way of life to be washed away in the tidal wave of Communism!

My fellow Americans, our form of government has established the faith that the great states of this country — and by that I mean the people themselves — have the ability to control their own destinies and to govern their own people. We cannot afford to lose that faith in the vain belief that we can legislate racial harmony and create human rights by federal decree.

In the words of DeMontesquieu: "The deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principles upon which it was founded."

There is no doubt that the political leaders of this nation have adjusted themselves to a growing disregard for the principles upon which our Republic was built. Unable to meet the great questions of the day in a manner in which all good Americans have always met such questions, they are pleading with us to throw up our hands, as they have, and depend upon "Uncle Santa Claus" to do everything.

Let us remind them, that when our states disclaim responsibility and give up the job, they will confer upon Washington the authority to mould and fashion our life to make it conform to a pattern over which the people have no control.

Let us remind Truman, Dewey, and Wallace that it is the American way to lead our people — not drive them.

And let us remind them that the states of this nation — particularly in the South — are becoming increasingly aware of their responsibilities. In every state the standard of living enjoyed by all races and all classes is gradually rising. Educational barriers between men are being broken down by understanding which increased education alone can bring. State governments are meeting their responsibilities.

But progress within the states is possible only because the state government is close to the people. It is subject to their wills, and to their direct control. It is not so remote that it will ever violate their customs and their traditions, because a state's government is based upon a complete understanding of what is best for its people.

That is the American way — the principle of representative government.
which three candidates for President are asking you to give up today.

The States' Rights Democrats — whose principles came from the people and who are governed by the desires of the people — stand between you and the loss of your democratic rights, in this and in all other states. We offer you the opportunity to cast out the false leaders who have yielded to the honeyed words of the faithless.

As good Democrats, we cannot and we will not let our great party be kidnapped by the pinks and the subversives, and prostrated to the demands of those who would destroy the United States Constitution. We shall recapture the leadership of the Democratic Party and restore it to the ideals and principles for which it has stood more than a century.

It is possible that we may do so by preventing any candidate from gaining a majority of the Electoral College vote, so that we can take the election to the House of Representatives. There the smaller states will be able to elect a President who will respect their rights.

But regardless of the outcome, our fight will not end on November 2. It will continue in ever-growing strength until this nation has returned to a new faith in the principles of government upon which it was founded. Our fight will continue until the political parties of this nation, of whatever name, have been returned to the basic ideals of the American way of life.

We can accomplish these aims only through the agency of the ballot box. The vote of our people is the most sacred privilege we have, and the only one by which our liberty can be preserved. By that vote in this election, our united voices will protect and uphold the immortal principle of the sovereignty of states, and through that principle, the everlasting rights of the individual man.