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States' Rights, 1948 October 22

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS BY J. SHERMAN THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AT NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, OCTOBER 22, 1948.

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

Those who love their freedom always feel at home in Tennessee, where the fundamentals of our liberty are held in high regard by a people whose traditions are rich with the legends of democracy.

As the standard bearer of an organization devoted to the preservation of the democratic ideal, I feel a new inspiration in this visit to Nashville. For it was here, in the "Athens of Dixie", that the great Andrew Jackson developed the qualities of understanding and democratic leadership that were to make him one of America's greatest Presidents.

In this critical hour in the history of our country, we often find it desirable to turn for counsel and advice to the words of men like Jackson. For in their time they dealt with the very origins of our democratic government and our way of life. They were the creators of representative, local self-government as we know it today.

These men knew that the success of the democracy they had created depended upon the balance of power between the federal government and the state governments. Repeatedly, they warned their
fellow-countrymen that if that balance should be disturbed, the only protection of individual rights would be destroyed.

Andrew Jackson himself said: "The destruction of our state governments, or the annihilation of their control over the local concerns of the people, would lead directly to revolution and anarchy, and finally to despotism and military domination."

"Control over the local concerns of the people" -- that was the inherent right of the state governments. It was a government close to the people, subject to easy adjustment by the people. Jefferson and Jackson, both of whom had fought tyranny and oppression throughout their lives, recognized that the breakdown of state control would inevitably mean the breakdown of government by the people.

And yet, in recent months, the American political system has turned sharply away from the principles which guarantee us our local self-government. Three candidates for the office of President have publicly announced that they were willing to violate the United States Constitution, and to repudiate the rights of states.

We Americans must face the fact that for the first time in our history, neither one of the old political parties has
made a stand for state sovereignty and representative government.

In the political platforms of the past, we have occasionally seen half-hearted measures which, if carried out, would have threatened the fundamentals of the Constitution. But never before have we witnessed a wholesale attack upon the Constitution like that of the so-called Civil Rights proposals adopted this year by both the Republicans and the Democrats. Never before have all these unconstitutional assaults been lumped together in one prize package of perfidy.

We in the South have opposed every one of these measures on the grounds that it violated our Constitutional right of control over the local concerns of our people. But now that all of them have been lumped together in one gigantic bid for the votes of a minority bloc, we must not and cannot fail to recognize them for what they really are -- a concerted attack upon our form of government in America.

We cannot fail to recognize that all the world today is involved in a struggle between two kinds of government -- the totalitarian as opposed to the democratic. The people who represent these opposing forces are so close to armed conflict in Europe as to make us wonder whether we are in war or out of it.

As Americans, we must calmly and realistically appraise
the strength and weaknesses of our own kind of democracy. We must take inventory, as carefully as we can. We must strengthen those principles which contribute to the democratic way, and we must cast out and repudiate all other influences.

For we know full well that if the totalitarian way ever gains a foothold in this country, it can sweep away our liberties and destroy the American principle of government by the people.

Let us ask a few searching questions of these three candidates for President who have sponsored a program that would give the totalitarian way a foothold in America.

Let us ask Mr. Truman how it came about that he launched this wholesale attack upon states' rights at a time when national unity was the paramount need.

Let us ask Mr. Dewey, who speaks so glibly of unity, how it happened that he endorses such measures as the FEPC, which would stir up more strife and create more ill-will among our people than any legislative step ever taken.

And let us ask Mr. Wallace why he is so hysterical in his support of a program that is basically communistic in its effects upon the liberties of the people.
My fellow Americans, the answers are not hard to find.

Mr. Truman tossed this invidious program at us because his lieutenants convinced him it was necessary, to win the votes of racial minorities in doubtful states.

Mr. Dewey eagerly picked it up because, after ten years of bargaining for the Presidency, he was willing to sponsor anything and everything designed to get votes.

And Mr. Wallace -- well, everyone knows where his sympathies lie.

But today millions of voters in every state in the Union are waking up to the fact that these three candidates have sold their birthrights to a selfish minority. Americans everywhere are coming to realize that the Presidency of the United States -- the greatest office in the gift of mankind -- has been degraded for low political purposes.

And by the millions they are turning to the banners of the States' Rights Democrats. For we alone of all political groups have had the courage to point an accusing finger at these perfidious leaders. We alone have had the courage to show up their "prize package of perfidy" for what it really is.
The States' Rights Democrats will stand in history as a stout fortress of resistance to all those who would sell out the rights of the American people in an effort to buy political power!

After the National Democratic Party had met at Philadelphia and repudiated the rights of states in favor of a promise to violate the Constitution, the people of the South knew beyond question that our loyalties had been scorned. We had been the bulwark of the party since the days of Andrew Jackson. But in the platform of the party in 1948, we saw clear evidence that this great political force had been turned aside from the historic principles which had made us adhere to it.

We turned away from Philadelphia, not in a spirit of hopelessness, but in a spirit of defiance to those who had seized control of our party. We recognized at once that the action at Philadelphia was not only inimical to the South, but that it did not represent the true beliefs and desires of the vast majority of Democrats all over the nation.

We saw no reason to allow the Reds and the subversives and the parlor pinks to kidnap the party. There was every reason to believe that these evil influences could be repudiated in this election, and that the party could be restored to the role it had
played in American affairs for 108 years. We were firm in the conviction that the spirit of true representative democracy was still alive in the hearts of true Democrats.

And in the few short months since Philadelphia, the States' Rights Democrats have come into being as a powerful testimonial to the verity of our convictions and the justice of our cause. All those who believed that the Democratic Party need not be sold down the river to ruin have gladly joined us. All those who believed that Constitutional democracy could be preserved in America have filled out our ranks. First they were numbered by the hundreds, then, quickly, by the thousands, and now our numbers are counted in the millions.

We are demonstrating to the nation that the States' Rights Democrats alone are loyal to the principles that created the Democratic Party and made it a great political force in this country.

And by means of our powerful voice in this election, we shall purge the Democratic Party of the un-American influences that now control it, and make it once again a great bulwark for government by the United States Constitution!
At an hour when the world’s democratic peoples must renew and rebuild all the safeguards they have against the inroads of the total state, America cannot afford to submit to the enactment of the hypocritical Civil Rights measures. Even the most casual study of this program reveals the manner in which its proponents have sought to invade our liberties on the pretense of gaining human rights.

A move to gain control of elections within the states is disguised by the Anti-Poll Tax Bill, which would take away the right of the people to establish regulations for voting.

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

A move to build up 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 hypocrisy of the Fair Employment Practices Act.

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. Truman has already admitted that a special division of the Department of
Justice is being trained for this purpose, with the proper "indoctrination" in the philosophy of the program. His Civil Rights Committee, you know, recommended that this police force be "indoctrinated" properly with the correct thought control theories.

"Indoctrinated" and "thought control" are words that belong in the Germany of Adolf Hitler, and in the Soviet Russia of Joseph Stalin. Such words have no place in a free democratic country such as ours.

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 an iron tyranny over our people. Anyone who doubts my words may read the story of the rise of Hitler. Anyone who doubts may read the Russian Constitution.

It is a sad commentary on the kind of political leadership we have in this country today, to realize that Truman, Dewey and Wallace have promised to enact the FEPC -- a piece of legislation which is based, almost word for word, on the Russian Constitution.

Governor Dewey has forced the FEPC 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 his 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 not.

Such regulations are now in effect 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 nothing less than involuntary servitude, to force a worker to associate on the job and in the labor unions with persons not of his choice.

That is the way of Communism. And it is the way of the Communists to undermine our industries, to force their saboteurs into our atomic laboratories, and to learn all our defense secrets. Truman, Dewey, and Wallace should be informed that their proposed FEPC would open the floodgates.
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.

If you doubt that the Communists want this bill passed because it is the main plank in their platform, you have only to remember that they rewarded a prominent American with a council award for persuading Truman to sponsor it. Yes, the Communists gave the chairman of Truman's Civil Rights committee a citation for his work.

And if you doubt that there is any danger of the FEPC bill being passed in the Congress, you have only to recall how close the Congress has come to invoking the cloture rule to cut off the debate of our Southern Senators, and thus destroy their only weapon against it. When the FEPC bill came up in 1946, Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky filed a motion for cloture to cut off further debate.

Barkley's motion then was narrowly defeated, but Barkley is running for Vice-president now, and we must presume that he is running on his record of sponsoring and supporting the FEPC.
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 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."

Let us see that deterioration does not begin in this country now.

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

It is time such people are told that passing a law does not solve a problem.
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 call their attention to the fact 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 can be increased only by increased education. 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 the people.

That is the American way— the way that three candidates for President are asking you to give up today.
The States' Rights Democrats stand upon principles which came from the people, and we are governed by principles representing the desires of the people. We stand between you and the loss of your democratic rights, in this and in all other states.

As good Democrats, we cannot and we will not let our great party remain in the hands of the pinks and the subversives, and prostrated to the demands of those who seek to destroy the United States Constitution.

Our primary aim is to throw the Presidential election into the House of Representatives, where the smaller states will have an opportunity to elect a President who will protect 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.

These things may be accomplished only through the God-given privilege of the ballot. By exercising that sacred privilege in this election, we can speak in a united voice to protect and uphold the immortal principles of the sovereignty of states and the everlasting rights of the individual man.