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Concerning a Letter Written to William H. Hastie, Governor of the Virgin Islands

Strom Thurmond

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STATEMENT BY J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA AND STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, WITH REGARD TO LETTER WRITTEN TO WILLIAM H. HASTIE, GOVERNOR OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. OCTOBER 25, 1948

Truman office holders and the anti-Southern newspaper columnists are stooping to a new low level in their efforts to prejudice voters against the States' Rights Democratic movement.

Those of us engaged in this campaign for constitutional government and state sovereignty have refused to permit racial issues to dominate our appeal for support. We have taken the broad position that the over-all issue involved was preservation of local self-government, as guaranteed to the states by the constitution. We have insisted that any weakening of their constitutional framework in this regard would be detrimental not only to the white and Negro races but to all minority groups who have found refuge within our shores.

We have, of course, realized that our country is faced with this constitutional crisis by reason of the reckless appeal of Truman, Wallace and Dewey for the bloc of Negro votes which hold the balance of power in several big states. We know that if the so-called civil rights program promised the Negro by the Republican, Progressive and Democratic platforms is carried out it would mean an end to our segregation laws in the South, force the Negro into our public places such as hotels, restaurants, swimming pools, and schools.

Tom Dewey's home state of New York, under his FEPC, is a clear example of what is proposed by the people of the nation now know that we are not going to stand for these conditions being imposed upon the South by the Federal government.

A vast majority of the Negroes of the South do not want social equality and the breaking down of our segregation laws and customs which we all know are best for both races. What the enlightened Negroes of the South is interested in is economic equality, equal justice under the law, and improved educational opportunities. We in the States' Rights Democratic movement
stand for these things and we will bring them about more quickly when Truman, Dewey, and Wallace cease competing with each other to see which one can offer the Negro bloc vote in the doubtful states the most political bait.

The States' Rights democratic campaign has not sought to stir up racial strife to win votes. This will continue to be our policy but while our campaign is planted on the high ground of tolerance and understanding, Harry Truman is using his Negro appointed Governor of the Virgin Islands to appeal to the prejudices of the Negro in an effort to keep Wallace from securing the Negro vote.

The pro-Truman newspaper columnists are giving wide publicity to a letter which my office sent to Governor Hastie of the Virgin Islands by a mistake.

After returning from the Governors' Conference, I directed that a form letter be sent to the absent governors expressing regret over their inability to be present. This letter carried the customary greetings which one Governor extends to another and an invitation when in South Carolina to visit me at the Governor's house.

A clerk in my office sent the letter to all the Governors on the roster of the Governors' Conference who were absent, including Governor Hastie of the Virgin Islands. The clerk did not know that Harry Truman, in his all-out bid for Negro votes, had gone so far as to take the unprecedented action of appointing a Negro Governor of the Virgin Islands.

I regret that Governor Hastie and the cohorts of President Truman have seen fit to take advantage of an understandable mistake on the part of a clerk in my office. Governor Hastie knows that neither he nor any other Negro will ever be a guest at the Governor's house in Columbia as long as I am Governor or as long as the Democratic Party of South Carolina continues to elect the Governors of my state.

And furthermore, if I am elected President, one of my first official acts will be to remove Governor Hastie and appoint...
a white man in his place so as to remove this embarrassment to
the Governors' Conference in forcing upon the Conference a Negro
who was made Governor of the Virgin Islands not by an election but
by Presidential mandate.