States' Rights, 1948 October 26

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS OF J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AT FAYETTEVILLE, ARK., OCTOBER 26, 1948

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

At the close of a most enjoyable and inspiring visit with the good people of Arkansas, I am happy to be privileged to be with you here in the great educational center of Fayetteville.

As a candidate for President who is just old-fashioned enough to believe in government by the Constitution of the United States, I am struck by the meaning of the state motto of Arkansas -- "The People Rule." A short motto, but within those words may be found the full meaning of the American system of government and the American way of life.

We are ruled by the people -- not by any one man or group of men who may have seized power.

It is time that we as Americans look more closely at the manner in which we have perpetuated government by the people. It is time that we examine the way in which our system differs from that of Soviet Russia, for instance.

We hold that our government is safeguarded by the terms of a Constitution, written by the people. Soviet Russia, however, also has a Constitution which Soviet leaders claim was written by the people.
We hold that we in America have a democracy. Soviet Russia, however, also claims to have a democracy.

Yet everyone knows that a few selfish men in the Kremlin maintain an iron control over the lives of Russian people which apparently the people cannot throw off. While in the United States any group which sought to monopolize power has always been quickly crushed.

Where is the difference?

It is not hard to find. In the United States we have maintained a system of checks and balances, with power divided between the state governments and the federal government. By reserving most of the power of government to the states, men like Thomas Jefferson made it certain that power could never be taken away from the people.

The new American system of government was different from the patterns of centralized control in Europe, because it enabled the people of the various states to govern themselves according to their own needs.

If that system had not been laid down in crystal clear language in the Constitution, there would have been nothing to prevent the United States from falling into the hands of a tyrant.
Today, the balance of power between the states and the Federal Government is no less a protection against tyranny than it was in the early days. It is the only guarantee we have that a kind of Kremlin will not be established in Washington. It is our only protection against the desire of Stalin to spread his doctrine of one-party, centralized control into our own land.

And yet we Americans have witnessed a wholesale assault upon the principle of local self-government in this political year of 1948. We have seen three Presidential candidates -- Truman, Dewey, and Wallace -- endorse and support platforms which would destroy the American system of balanced power.

We have seen them adopt a program which would be the entering wedge for the breaking down of our state lines, just as Hitler broke down the German states when he came to power.

Out of their desire to bid against each other for the votes of a minority bloc in the big-city states, Truman, Dewey and Wallace have all three advocated the breaking down of states' rights.

But those of us who place love for country above the desire for political power were unwilling to let these three candidates go unchallenged. We were unwilling to sit idly at home while the American people were denied the right to express their opposition to a program that is openly in violation of
the Constitution.

The States' Rights Democrats are resisting this betrayal of American ideals. We oppose this attempt to change our form of government and to change the very way in which we live in this country!

When these candidates first made their cheap appeal to the minority groups, a great many people believed that the effects of the program would be felt only in the South. Today, millions of Americans are realizing that once the principle of state sovereignty is destroyed, the freedoms of all Americans everywhere will be in mortal danger. They are recognizing that the fight which has been thrust upon us is a governmental one, and not a racial fight -- all of the high-powered propaganda of our opponents to the contrary notwithstanding.

Americans are beginning to realize, too, that the vicious program endorsed by the National Democrats and the Republicans would not only have a drastic effect upon the South, but that it would change the way of life and affect the liberties of every citizen in every state.

The proponents of this program are trying to sell it to the nation on the basis that it guarantees -- or creates -- human rights. These claims are false. It is ridiculous to
suppose that human rights may be created by destroying the
framework of the Constitution. It is by means of the
United States Constitution and its guarantees of local
self-government that human rights are protected.

The so-called "Civil Rights" program of Truman,
Dewey, and Wallace is full of the same kind of deception that
prostrated Europe, and that is spreading out of Russia today
into every corner of the earth. It is time we in America
girded ourselves against that evil doctrine by renewing our
faith in our own kind of democracy. It is most certainly not
logical that we should begin now to undermine the Constitution
and to change the American system.

Those who advocate that we depart from the
Constitution, do so at the risk of treason to their country.
We must make this plain to them, whether they be Republican
or Democrat or Progressive. And we can make it plain to them
only in the traditional American way -- by the use of our
privilege of voting.

A vote cast for the States' Rights Democrats is
therefore a vote of loyalty to the American way of life.

Those who engaged in the un-American performance
of the Philadelphia conventions committed a deep offense against
the Southern states. Their action jeopardizes the forward strides
Recently achieved in liberal and progressive thought and viewpoint in the South. Catering in high places to the favor of professional agitators and mercenary missionaries of ill-will has set the stage for new racial antagonisms which had been almost entirely stamped out over the years by the increasingly enlightened public opinion of our people.

Those of us in the South who have worked hard in the cause of liberalism and constructive endeavor in the field of human and economic progress, have been forced to turn aside to meet an attack upon the Constitution, and upon our right to direct and guide ourselves. The task of the liberal in the South today is to save the hard-won ground which we have gained from destruction by ill-advised and irresponsible meddling from without.

When that intermeddling takes the form of Federal usurpation of the rights of states, no responsible Southerner can be silent. No loyal Southerner can afford to endorse it with his vote. And no loyal Democrat can follow the lead of the machine minority bosses and the parlor pinks in the prostration of that great Party to an un-American and unconstitutional program.

All over the South and in many other states, millions of good Democrats are determined that our Party shall be restored to the principles for which it was organized. We shall reclaim and rebuild the Democratic Party, beginning with
this election, and make it once again a great voice for the
sovereignty of states and for the personal freedom of the
individual man.

Those who join with us in this effort may feel
that they have had a great share in the restoration of the
Democratic Party to its historic devotion to the Constitution!

Those of you who have studied the so-called Civil
Rights proposals, know that I do not speak lightly when I
say they would change our way of life.

We Americans enjoy a Constitutional right to regulate
elections within our states, and to fix voting qualifications.
That right is under attack in the Anti-Poll Tax Bill.

We enjoy the right to control our state courts, to
pass laws for the control of crimes within our states, and to
regulate and control our own police. All these rights are under
attack in the Anti-Lynching Bill.

We enjoy the right to pass laws concerning the
separation of the races, in states where it is considered needful.
Such laws enable us to maintain peace and harmony between the
races, according to the needs of our individual states. Our
right to do so is attacked by the Anti-Segregation proposals.
We Americans also enjoy the right of private enterprise, which means the right to employ in our businesses and our industrial plants those persons most suitable to the progress and prosperity of our businesses. But the so-called Fair Employment Practices Act would take away that right.

Finally, we enjoy the right to control the policing of our states and the regulation of crime. That right is under attack in the enforcement proposals of the Civil Rights legislation, which provide for a national police not very different from the Gestapo of Hitler.

All these proposals were endorsed by Truman, Dewey, and Wallace at the demands of a minority bloc which has as its first aim the breaking down of separation of the races in our homes, our schools, our theatres, and in all public places. To gain that end, they are willing to break down the Constitution at the same time that they are breaking down segregation.

This is another attempt to drive the South into doing the impractical and the impossible in our racial relations. Racial harmony in the South, and the progress of all races in the South depends upon state laws which fit our own situations. Violations of those laws can mean only new obstacles to progress. But, because the selfish minority groups demand it, Truman, Dewey, and Wallace have promised to force the South to get into line.
They make these promises in spite of the fact that the Negro race has made greater progress under the Southern bi-racial civilization than any other race ever did in a similar period. They have adopted this program in spite of the fact that, under its own customs and laws, the South is now entering upon an era of economic gains which promises to be the greatest in our history, for all races.

These things are promised under the guise of human rights. As a matter of fact, the FEPC, which is the worst phase of the program sponsored by these three candidates, is a direct violation of human rights. Heretofore, we have always recognized the right of the individual to choose his own associates, at work or during recreation. Yet the FEPC would fine or imprison a working man who refused to stay on the job beside someone he does not like. We have always recognized the right of a business man to employ those persons who he believes are best suited to his business, and who will get along well together. But the FEPC would force such a man to employ persons he does not wish to employ.

Under this law, a working man could not even quit his job in protest, without facing severe punishment. He could not even decide who shall be members of his labor unions, and use his union hall.
No thinking American would deny that the right to employ persons of your choice, and the right to associate with persons of your choice, are civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

The endorsement of the FEPC by the Republicans should make you want to take a closer look at their candidate, Governor Dewey. As a leading sponsor of the national FEPC, Dewey claims credit for enforcing this vicious law in New York State, which is of course his privilege under our system of government.

But let us look at the New York FEPC regulations so as to determine what Dewey's national law might be. In New York it is unlawful to ask an applicant for a job what his former name was if he had changed it. You can't ask him for a birth certificate, or whether he is a native-born, or to show his naturalization papers. You can't ask him whether he is an atheist. You can't ask him what his complexion is, or to send a photograph if he is applying by mail. You can't even ask him what his military service has been, or where he was during World War I.

My friends, we all admit Governor Dewey's right to sponsor such a law in New York State. But we cannot permit him, or Truman, or Wallace, to impose it upon the whole country!
There is no middle ground in this election. A vote for either of these three candidates is an indication that you want an FEPC and all the other vicious laws that go with it. A vote for the States' Rights Democrats is your only means of preserving your right to participate in your own government.

As good Americans, we must join together to repudiate the un-American influences which pervaded our national conventions at Philadelphia this year.

Let us repudiate forever the influences which would break down our state control, and reach down to change our everyday lives.

We Americans, unlike many hundreds of millions of oppressed people on this earth, have within our grasp the means by which mankind may destroy political oppression for all time. We can, by the example we set, lead the peoples of the world into a new life of self-fulfillment and happiness. That is our challenge today.

Let us meet that challenge by our opposition to tyranny in government, and our faith in the democratic ideal.