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States' Rights, 1948 October 28

Strom Thurmond

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

I am happy to be in Texas once again tonight, for when I am in Texas I am invariably inspired by the atmosphere of growth and development among the cities of Texas, and by the forward-looking spirit of her people.

It was in Texas nearly three months ago that Governor Wright and I were privileged to accept the standards of the States Rights Democrats, and to begin a campaign which has since spread over the South and into every corner of the nation.

We said in Houston, on August 14, "If America is to remain free, her people must never submit to any candidate undertaking to barter away any part of our constitution for political gain."

I repeat these words tonight, because they are, to a large extent, the sum and substance of the message that the States Rights Democrats have taken to the American people.

If we permit our political organizations to go unchallenged when they debase themselves by promising to violate the Constitution to bid for the votes of a minority group, then we open the doors to Communism in this country.

These words are not mere oratorical sentiments. I say them now with courage, and with full faith and confidence in the American people, because I do not want to say them later hopelessly and helplessly, when it is too late.

I say them now in the faith that the American people will take action, as they always have, because I do not want to say them at some future day when the time to act is passed, and the opportunity to act may not come again.

We have been loyal to our political organizations, and to the promises they made. Tonight, we must look upon our political organizations through the eyes of loyalty -- loyalty to the American principles for which they have stood.

We must ask ourselves: where are those American principles today?

As Americans who believe in our form of government, we cannot take our political affiliations lightly. We cannot remain silent and subdued while both our major parties are reduced to sacrificing the precepts of the Constitution for political purposes.
For we know that every word of that Constitution is a fortress against the invasion of totalitarian theories from abroad. We know that every time a word of the Constitution is rendered meaningless, a new loophole is opened through which the agents of centralized government may force their theories upon us.

Political platforms and their promises are a great deal more important today than they used to be, because of the widespread dissemination of information by press and radio. The American public cannot take political promises lightly today.

There was a time, a century ago, when the political party itself had little to do with forming the policies of our government. But today, a political party is just as important in the maintenance of our American kind of democracy as any other phase of our national life.

We cannot, therefore, permit our political parties to become the official organs of a selfish, un-American group which is seeking to strip our states of power, and to create a federal dictatorship in Washington.

The public sale of the Republican and the Democratic platforms to the minority machine must not go unchallenged. If we remain silent while this group takes over our political parties, we shall be caught up in a wind that will grow to whirlwind proportions and sweep away all our rights in the end.

The minority machine, operating in big-city states from which Presidential candidates usually come because of their big electoral vote, this year succeeded in forcing their program of unconstitutional legislation upon both major parties. They forced Truman and Dewey to promise to invade the Constitution, because both Truman and Dewey thought the false slogans of human rights offered by the program would win votes.

But all Americans have not been blinded by the false banners raised up by those who would change our government and with it our way of life. All Americans are not fooled. We have found a way to meet the challenge.

Americans are going to use the great privilege of the ballot box to meet this threat with the determination that the principles of American democracy shall not be violated and destroyed.

Every vote that is cast for the States Rights Democrats will be a testimonial that America does not want the mis-named Civil Rights program of Truman, Dewey, and Wallace. Those who want to resist this program may do so only by voting the States Rights Democratic ticket.

We shall tell them with our votes that we will not yield our state control of elections and voting qualifications to an Anti-Poll Tax Bill, which would open the way to federal control of the manner in which we choose our own representatives in Congress.
We will not yield our control of state courts and state laws to an Anti-Lynching Bill, which uses the horrors of an almost non-existent crime as a pretext to turn state laws into federal laws.

We will not yield control of our laws separating the races, which permit us to establish harmonious relations between the races in a manner suitable to our various states. We will not break down separation of the races in states where such action would promote lawlessness and discord, in order that politicians may gain power with their Anti-Segregation proposals.

We will not force our business men to conform with a federal pattern like the FEPC, which would deny them the right to choose their employees according to their needs. We will not yield the right of our working men to associate on the job and in their labor halls with persons of their own choice, or force them to work beside persons they do not want to associate with.

And we cannot endorse the plan of Truman to set up a federal police force like that of the Gestapo in Hitler's Germany, to spread a network of federal spies into every community in America.

I do not believe the people of the South will help Harry Truman to retain his office so that he can force this FEPC on the country -- so that he can break down segregation in the armed forces -- so that he can continue to enlarge his present Civil Rights division in the Department of Justice until it has covered the country.

And I do not believe the people of the South will support Governor Dewey in his announced intention to set up a national FEPC, and his promise to carry out the other civil wrongs proposals and break down the rights of our states.

While we are on the subject of Governor Dewey -- the movie-type glamour boy of the big-city machines -- let us recall that he hand-picked the man who wrote the FEPC Bill now pending in the Senate. Senator Ives of New York wrote that bill, and whether he knew it or not, it is patterned after a law forced upon Soviet Russia by Stalin in 1920. A vote for Dewey is therefore a vote for the Ives Bill, and for the regimentation of private business in this country.

No doubt Governor Dewey would recommend that his proposed FEPC adopt the same rules as those adopted by his New York FEPC. If so, our business men and industrial men would find it unlawful to ask a man any questions which would show whether he might be a Communist or not. He would find it unlawful to ask an applicant for employment whether he had ever used a fictitious name, or what his complexion was if he applied in writing, or who his family was, or whether he is an atheist, or even where he was in World War I.
This is the kind of thing that Dewey, Truman, and Wallace have promised the racial minorities that they will force upon you.

Men and women of Texas, I cannot believe that there is anything in your customs or your way of life that will make you want to yield to a remote federal control of the manner in which you carry on your businesses. I cannot believe that the people of Texas will change their way of life to conform with an FEPC pattern such as the people of Russia have had forced upon them.

I stand on the faith that Texas will help to stop this misguided and misbegotten FEPC in the only way they can -- by voting with the States Rights Democrats in this election!

The FEPC would be the greatest obstacle ever placed in the path of our people in their effort to bring industries to the South. The strife and discord it would cause would set back our industrial development 25 years, at a time when we are just beginning to achieve something like economic equality with the rest of the nation. It would have an effect similar to the unfair freight rates which kept the South in a crown colony status for 80 years.

And let me remind you that the same Governor Dewey who is sponsoring the FEPC is the man who, bitterly fought the efforts of Southern Governors to set aside the practice of charging as much as 39% more to move freight out of the South than out of the North. He was our worst opponent in our struggle to get fair freight rates so that more industry would come South.

At the time, Dewey said it was to the best interests of northern industry to maintain unfair freight rates. Of course it was. You cannot get new industry to move to Texas, if they are going to have to pay 39% more to move goods, as Dewey insists they must.

And I'll tell you another thing: It will be to the best interests of northern industry to force the FEPC on our states. It would give them an advantage against which we probably could not compete. Let us ask Governor Dewey whether he is sponsoring the FEPC for the same reason that he fought our effort to win equal freight rates.

No, I cannot believe Texas will give Dewey, or Harry Truman, or anyone else a mandate to cripple our industry.

My fellow Americans, the matters of which I speak are not mere temporary issues. They strike deeply into the very bone and sinew of our American system. The encroachment they represent must inevitably lead to a complete federal usurpation of our right of local self-government, unless we lift up our voices to stop them in this election.
The States Rights Democrats have provided loyal Americans with their only opportunity to return this nation to the form of government under which we have risen together. The vote we shall receive in this election will serve to restore the great Democratic Party to a firm position of loyalty to real American principles.

The Democratic Party can be returned to the precepts for which its platform spoke in 1856 under Buchanan, and in 1864 under Cleveland, and 1912 under Wilson, and in 1932 under Roosevelt.

All these great Democrats, and the party they headed, were unanimous in declaring that the chief among our principles of party faith is a devotion to a plan of government, expressly reserving to the States or to the people the powers not granted by them to the Federal Government.

Those words were not idly spoken by the great Democrats of the past. They were part and parcel of the basic understanding which held Democrats together. They represented the true beliefs of the vast majority of Americans, in the Democratic Party and out of it.

We maintain, and millions of States Rights Democrats maintain, that the vast majority of the members of the Democratic Party still believe in those principles. We are firm in the conviction that we can restore them to their proper place in the future platforms of the Party.

Those who would have us forget those principles will be repudiated and disgraced after this election, and we shall be able to form a powerful voice within the Party to regain it for the democratic way. Our efforts will not cease until that aim has been accomplished.

We cannot remain silent and submissive in a political year when neither of the old parties has taken a stand for the principle of states' rights, and when both of them have promised to violate the Constitution in a wholesale manner.

The American system of local self-government is confronted with its greatest test since the Constitution was signed in 1787. Europe, Russian, and the entire world are waiting to see whether the American people will vote to tear down our Constitution, and thus to weaken and undermine the best protection the world has against totalitarianism.

We cannot spend our time with other domestic issues, as Dewey and Truman have done, to the exclusion of the most important issue. All other issues fade away into nothing by comparison to this threat to our way of life and our form of government.
The American people through their elected representatives have shown their ability to solve their internal problems with justice to all men. And the State of Texas, like the other states of this nation, is perfectly capable of solving her own local problems, without dictation from Washington bureaucrats.

Dewey and Truman are telling you that you can no longer handle the concerns of importance here in your own state. But the States' Rights Democrats are dedicated to the belief that you can solve those problems; and that you will continue to solve them in the traditional American way.

Let us join our voices in this election in a new testimonial of faith in our way of life, and let us bring our states back into the full enjoyment of all the privileges that combine to make this the greatest nation on earth.