11-4-1948

Address at South Carolina Industrial Safety Conference, Wade Hampton Hotel, Columbia, South Carolina

Strom Thurmond

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Recommended Citation
Thurmond, Strom, "Address at South Carolina Industrial Safety Conference, Wade Hampton Hotel, Columbia, South Carolina" (1948). Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100. 602.
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ADDRESS BY J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AT SOUTH CAROLINA INDUSTRIAL SAFETY CONFERENCE, WADE HAMPTON HOTEL, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1948, 10:15 A.M.

MY FELLOW SOUTH CAROLINIANs:

It is a pleasure to be with you here today, and to see that so many of my friends are interested in the vital subject of safety. We have just completed a vigorous campaign in the South for the constitutional principles of state sovereignty and local self-government, and one of our consistent points was that a state is capable of handling its own internal problems without federal direction. This conference is good evidence of what may be accomplished within a state by the cooperation of the people of that state.

I am informed that this safety conference, which has been held annually for 11 years, is considered one of the finest in the nation.

Here in South Carolina we are engaged upon a great effort to improve our State by bringing in new industries to increase our income and to raise the living standards of our people. We have raised our average income from only 37 per cent of the national average in 1929 to 61 per cent last year. Our people may now hope to approach the national average levels of income by means of industrial expansion. This is indicated by the fact that there are plants now under construction or scheduled
to begin operation this year in our State costing $60,000,000.

Since 1946, some 950 plants costing $120,000,000 have scheduled expansion or new construction. That is a wholesome and encouraging fact to anyone who loves our State.

But as we consider the problems of building up our industries, we must not forget the important factor of the need for a greater emphasis on industrial safety and the prevention of accidents. I have been seriously concerned in recent months by the growth in the number of accidents suffered by our people, and at the tremendous loss not only in dollars but in human resources. Our wealth lies in our people, and if we are to conserve our manpower and enjoy the greatest benefits of the work of our people, we cannot fail to be concerned with questions of industrial safety.

In studying the problem of how we may best reduce the accidents that cost us so much in this State, I have also been concerned by the high workmen's compensation rates we have to pay. I am told that South Carolina's rate is considerably higher than that of any State in this region. Here we have a situation which must not be allowed to continue.

Records of the administration of our Workmen's Compensation Act indicate that South Carolina is considered
the third most liberal State in the matter of administration of this law. Only New York and California are given credit for more liberal execution of the Act. But these records also show that the number of claims for compensation has grown steadily through the years. There were 42,000 claims recorded during the fiscal year 1946-47, as compared with only 11,458 during the first year under the Act, 1936-37. The amount of money paid out by the State has increased from $250,677 the first year to $1,763,846 during 1946-47.

It is evident that we must take some active steps to reduce the number of accidents in South Carolina. For each of the 42,000 claims represents human misery in some form. In some cases it meant the death of a loved one. In others an arm or a leg was lost, and in large number some minor impairment resulted from the accident involved.

After a careful study of this problem I have determined upon a plan by which I believe the State of South Carolina may achieve considerable progress in preventing accidents in our industries. I shall recommend that our Industrial Commission enlarge its present safety division to include at least one field man for each congressional district.
At present the safety division of the Commission has one man charged with the promotion of safety in the State. Obviously he cannot hope to make a completely successful attack on this problem by working alone. But given the assistance of field men who can work steadily in their various districts among their industries, I believe we may hope to cut down accidents sharply, conserve our human resources, and thereby reduce our workmen's compensation rates.

Records have shown that the type of educational work such men can do will go a long way toward reducing the number of accidents in industrial plants. By organizing safety clubs, showing safety movies, installing carefully worded posters, and by making regular safety inspections along with the plant management, such men may get at the source of accidents and stop them before they happen. I believe most of you here will agree that much can be done in safety work through education under proper supervision.

An enlarged safety division in the Industrial Commission would cost the State a little money each year, but I sincerely believe it would quickly pay for itself by reducing the amount paid out in claims. I am sure that the people of the State as a whole would benefit financially from the reduction
in compensation rates that would follow. Thus we would enjoy the benefits of a plan which would serve the best interests of both employers and employees.

I shall recommend the adoption of this plan in the sincere belief that we must act quickly to reduce the toll of accidents in our State.

The promotion of safety is, after all, a matter of the human element. That is, we can do more with the man than with the machine in preventing accidents. Much has been done in recent years along mechanical lines, such as proper casings for belts and gears, and the like. But the problem is basically a human one. We must find some way of reaching the men and women themselves. The plan I have outlined is, I believe, a good method of doing so.

Most of our larger industries already have good safety programs, and there are some industries in our State which have excellent records in preventing accidents. Conferences such as this one today have accomplished a great deal. But the fact remains that our accident claims have reached an all-time high, and we cannot attribute this entirely to high employment or to the increasing number of outside jobs in construction.
work. We must recognize the safety problem as one of increasing importance, and one that must be solved if we are to take advantage of our State's opportunity to reach new levels of income.

When a working man or woman is crippled for life, the cost in human suffering is not borne by one person alone. It reaches back to affect the morale and the courage of his family and friends. It leaves a blank place in the organization in which he had served. It creates a mental hazard upon all those who were working beside him when the accident happened.

There is really no way of estimating the cost of our accidents in this State. Perhaps if we could evaluate that cost just one time, we might be spurred into a more active attempt to solve the safety problem.

In my examination of this problem I have learned that our Industrial Commission believes we have only been scratching the surface thus far in our efforts to prevent accidents in South Carolina. In their dealings directly with the employees, the members of the Industrial Commission feel a responsibility and obligation to develop a definite program to reduce accidents. The pain and suffering of humanity which shows up day after day on the records of the Commission indicate that we all have an equally great responsibility in this respect.
This problem takes its place among many others which we as South Carolinians must labor to solve if we are to help our State in its great uphill fight for economic security and for the great happiness of our people. We have a tremendous opportunity, if we will but work hard together. We must provide an honest, progressive, and efficient State government. We must broaden our educational opportunities. We must develop greater production per person on the farm. We must continue to sponsor industrial development, and we must expand and foster an adequate health program.

These points, taken together, represent a comprehensive program at which I have tried to work as your Governor. It is beginning to take effect in many ways already, and it will continue to develop as long as our people recognize their duties as citizens to help lift up our State to great heights and to a better life for all.

But in all our efforts we must not forget the human factor. We must not forget that dollars are less important than hearts and minds. In attacking problems such as that of reducing accidents, we should recognize the human factor first, and base our efforts upon it.

I am convinced that our people will solve this problem once they realize its importance. Let us work together toward that end, and toward a happier and more prosperous South Carolina.