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Celebrating Sesquicentennial of Establishment of the Capital at Washington, D.C.

Strom Thurmond

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On behalf of the people of South Carolina, I want to express our deep appreciation for the honor bestowed upon us by the dedication of these Sesquicentennial exercises to our State, of whose record we are so proud, and to which we are so ardently devoted.

South Carolina's importance in the making of the new nation over which this federal capital was to preside can hardly be said to have been excelled by that of any other. For more than a hundred years before Washington was established, South Carolina had borne the principal burdens of defending the Southern frontier against the encroachments of Spain and France, thus holding a vast territory that later became part of the United States. In the movement leading to the separation of the 13 colonies from England, South Carolina was the first to embody the new principles of self-government in a thorough and complete Constitution. In the long war that followed, no other state was called upon to make greater sacrifices of life and property. The very mention of such names as Rutledge, Gadsden, Hayne, Laurens, Jasper, Moultrie, Sumter, and Marion, bears witness to
the extent and worth of these sacrifices.

South Carolina was no less interested in the new federal system than she had been in the war that made the union possible. To the Federal Convention of 1787 they sent John Rutledge, Pierce Butler, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Charles Pinckney. Each contributed in some important way to the drafting of the Constitution. It is now admitted, after much controversy, that Charles Pinckney laid before that Convention a plan which anticipated a greater number of the provisions of the finished Constitution than did any other. I cannot resist calling attention to one of these provisions, which concerned the establishment of the federal capital. It was Charles Pinckney, I am proud to say, who first proposed Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 17 of the Constitution, which is now the basic law of the District of Columbia, and the City of Washington.

I think Pinckney was influenced in this by the fact that South Carolina, a few months before, had decided to transfer its capital from Charleston to a spot near the center of the State. In the procedure the State followed, there are striking similarities to the procedure used in arrangements for the federal capital. In both cases, the site selected was in open country, not in a populous town. In both cases, the name of Washington was proposed for the new city. South Carolina did not choose that
name, but it is interesting to note that the name it did choose, Columbia, was later given to the federal district around Washington. Finally, I should also point out that the architect who designed the South Carolina State House, James Hoban, later drew plans for the White House and other buildings in Washington.

Such were the ties between the State of South Carolina and the early history of the federal capital. They were surface ties, it is true, but they were indicative of the deeper bonds of devotion to the great dream of a federal republic in which men could be equal and free under a system of government the world had never known before.