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Address on Senate campaign opponent's public record

Strom Thurmond

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My fellow South Carolinians:

The Supreme Court of this state has held that "the public conduct of every public man is a matter of public concern." "When one becomes a candidate for an office his character for honesty and integrity and his qualifications and fitness for the position are put before the public, and are thereby made proper subjects for fair comment."

These holdings of our courts show just how ridiculous it is for a candidate running for the highest public office in the gift of the people of South Carolina to try to claim immunity from discussion of his public record in this campaign.

What I have said about my opponent's past actions are facts taken from the record. These things bear on his fitness to hold high public office. The people have a right to know these things. I have never engaged in personalities in any campaign, and I shall not do so in this campaign.

I have submitted my own record and challenged my opponent to discuss it. I have discussed my opponent's public record and I intend to continue to discuss it.

Throughout this campaign my opponent has talked a great deal about state finances. When the campaign opened at Lexington, he said that the state had a $12,000,000 surplus when he left the Governor's office. A few days later he said it was a $15,000,000 surplus. A day or so passed, and he said it was a $20,000,000 surplus, and even distributed hand bills using this $20,000,000 figure. I waited patiently to see just how far out on this limb he would go. Finally, he has put an ad in the newspapers of the state in which he says, and I quote: "Left $20,000,000 surplus in 1938."

Now, let us see how true is this statement by my opponent.

Governor Burnet Maybank succeeded my opponent as Governor in January 1939. If my opponent left a $20,000,000 surplus, Governor Maybank and the General Assembly were unable to find it. Instead, the General Assembly convened in January 1939 and adjourned on July 1, 1939, after the longest session in the state's history. The reason for this long session is set forth in Governor Maybank's message to
the legislature, found in the Acts of the General Assembly for 1939, at page 656. Governor Maybank said, and I quote:

"When the General Assembly convened in January you faced an almost impossible task in continuing the operations of the state institutions and at the same time protecting the taxpayers. The state was finishing its fiscal year with a deficit of approximately $4,000,000 and an actual cash deficit of $1,000,000." That is the statement of Governor Maybank.

Does that sound like my opponent left a $20,000,000 surplus to his successor in 1938? Actually there was a deficit; the state's finances had to be re-arranged; major financial problems were still unsolved after the legislature had worked on them for 100 legislative days; the public welfare program was endangered; and the schools could remain open only with the aid of a three mill property levy. This was the result of four years of my opponent's stewardship as Governor.

I ask you what dependence can you put in anything a candidate says, if that candidate will make and publish a statement of fact that he left a $20,000,000 surplus in the state treasury, when the official records show that he left the state in financial chaos.

Let us make some more comparisons between his record and mine.

During the four year term of my opponent as Governor, approximately $31,000,000 was made available as state support for public education. During my four year term, over $120,000,000 was made available from state funds, an increase of nearly 400%.

When my opponent completed his four year term as Governor, the average teacher's salary was $730. Today it is $1825, an increase of almost 300%. The state's annual appropriation for public education has increased nearly 100% since I have been Governor.

During my four years as Governor, $6,000,000 of state funds were given to counties to aid them in hospital and health center construction. During my opponent's four year term, no such appropriations were made.

During my term as Governor the state has rendered many new services to our people and has sent money to counties in aiding them in reducing their local property levies. We have met the cost and
still kept state finances on a sound basis and the budget balanced. We have not left financial chaos to be solved by the next administration, as my opponent did.

During my opponent's term as Governor, this state was torn with strife -- strife between labor and management, strife between the Governor's office and the legislature and the courts; strife between the Governor's office and the highway commission, and other departments of government.

During my term as Governor, we have had peaceful and progressive industrial relations, and our workers have lost less in wages from strikes and lockouts than in any other state in the union. We have had harmonious relations between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government.

In my opponent's term of office, he declared a state of insurrection and used the national guard to drive the duly elected highway commission out of the state capitol, he used the national guard to seize ballot boxes from Democratic Party officials, and he used the national guard to deal with industrial strikes in our mills. I have not called out the national guard a single time for such purposes, and since I have been Governor, we have not had bayonet rule in the government and elections in South Carolina.

During my opponent's four year term there was only $42,000,000 in new capital invested in this state for industrial expansion. During my term $425,000,000 in new capital has been invested or allocated for industrial expansion in our state, an increase of over 1,000 percent.

In the campaign meetings, I have charged that my opponent's term of office was characterized by a vicious pardon racket. I have cited the record to show that over 3,200 criminals, including murderers and rapists, were turned back on the communities where their crimes were committed. This pardon racket shook the very foundations of law and order in South Carolina.

If I had done nothing more as Governor than to destroy forever this shameful pardon racket, I could look back on my term of office as one of great benefit to South Carolina.

Let us turn to my opponent's record in the United States Senate. He tells you about a great many things which he says he will do if he
is elected again. But he has already had six years in the Senate, and you will search hard and long to try to find anything which he has done for the people of South Carolina in those six years. He goes around saying that he got a bill through recently to restore cotton acreage which had been cut, but if he had been on the job as a member of the Agriculture Committee this unjust cut would not have happened in the first place. This is like letting the horse be stolen and then bragging about getting a part of the horse back.

My opponent tries to defend his desertion of the Democratic Party of South Carolina to support Truman in 1948 by saying he had to run out on the Democratic Party of his state to protect his committee assignments.

Senator Burnet R. Maybank did not desert the democratic party of South Carolina to support Truman. He carried out instructions of the State Party by refusing to take his seat on the Democratic National Committee and he is today Chairman of one of the most powerful committees in the Senate.

Congressman Dick Richards of South Carolina made speeches for the States Rights movement in 1948 and he is today the ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Congressman Mendel Rivers spoke for the States Rights movement and the Democratic Party of South Carolina in 1948 and today he is a ranking democrat on the House Armed Forces Committee.

I could go on naming other Democratic members of Congress who opposed Truman and today hold important Democratic committee assignments. The Truman administration may refuse to recognize the democratic party of South Carolina but the House and Senate still recognize the Democratic Party of South Carolina and it will be a sad day in this nation if the Congress becomes a Truman rubber stamp as my opponent would have you believe it is.

The people of South Carolina are not as gullible as my opponent thinks. He left the Democratic Party of South Carolina because he wanted to be a Trumanite and he did so after he told the people of South Carolina that no decent white Southerner could support the election of Harry Truman as President.
My opponent talks about what a great thing is his two and one half years seniority on the Senate agriculture committee. He was singing a different tune six years ago when he asked the people to turn the late Senator Cotton Ed Smith out of the Senate. Senator Smith was Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and had over 30 years seniority in the Senate but my opponent talked the people into defeating him.

There is another comparison which should be made. When I ran for Governor, I entered into a contract with the people to serve my full four year term for the salary then paid for the office which was $7,500.00 annually. In my first year as Governor, the legislature raised the Governor's salary to $12,000. I vetoed this increase, and continued to draw $7,500, and turned back into the state treasury the sum of $18,000 during my four years.

When my opponent ran for the Senate, the salary of a Senator was $10,000 a year. He also entered into a contract with the people to serve them for six years at $10,000 a year. My opponent voted himself a raise to $12,500 and an additional sum of $2,500 a year on which he does not have to pay any income tax.

Not only this, but my opponent voted to raise President Truman's salary from $75,000 to $100,000 a year, and gave him an additional $50,000 a year on which he has to pay no income taxes. I am told that this much tax free money is the equivalent of $350,000 a year. While all this was going on, my opponent voted against reducing the high income taxes being paid by ordinary people, including you and me.

When it came to voting funds to win the cold war against Communist expansion, and avoid a shooting war, my opponent was economy minded. But when it came to a tax free annual handout to himself and President Truman, he was not economy minded.

The cause of South Carolina Democracy, with which I am proud to be associated, is sweeping our State from the mountains to the sea. Our opposition is already aware that their only hope to win this election is to get the organized Negro vote, and obviously relies on the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people to regiment this vote from outside.

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Our people are seeing more clearly every day that if the Democrats of South Carolina split up, the organized minority bloc voters will set themselves up in our state as the balance of power, as they have done in New York and other states.

We have received reports from each of the 46 counties, and our leaders tell us that our people are not going to run the risk of having the will of the real Democrats of South Carolina overruled by outside regimentation of voters who have no right to be in our primary because they are opposed to the social and educational separation of the races and favor the Truman program.

We whipped these Trumanites in South Carolina in 1948, and with the continued good work of our friends in every county we will win a victory on July 11th for the cause of South Carolina Democracy which will make the whole nation stop, look and listen and realize once and for all that South Carolina is not going to accept the Truman program to destroy our civilization in the South or have a Trumanite in the United States Senate.

Thank you - and good night.