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Statement at Senate campaign meeting describing Johnston's vacillation about Truman

Strom Thurmond

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This afternoon I want to present to you the most remarkable performance in American political history.

I give you now the words of the champion political jumping-jack of all time.

On January 30, 1948, my opponent told reporters in Columbia that the civil rights program was only a Republican trick to throw the Democrats into confusion.

On February 2, President Truman sent his civil rights message to Congress.

On February 12, my opponent said: "It looks as if things have gone so far now that the only thing the South can do is to arise and get together. There is no limit to what I'd do about it. If it takes breaking away from the Democratic party, then I say break away."

On February 15, after the Southern Governors had adopted my resolution protesting the President's program, and calling for a conference with the national party leadership to get them to withdraw the civil rights program in the interest of party unity, my opponent said in Washington: "We do not want to compromise with (the party leaders). We want a separate convention and our own electors so we can choose a man who will be responsible to
the will of the party."

On February 25, my opponent said Secretary of State Marshall, author of the Marshall Plan, was just the man for President.

On March 1, in Columbia at a meeting of the Democratic Committee, my opponent said "every Southern state is ready to join with South Carolina in a united movement."

It was about this time that he said "No decent white Southerner can vote for Truman."

On March 12, my opponent plumped solidly for General Eisenhower for President.

On March 13, my opponent said: "We are going to have a Democratic President in November but his name won't be Harry Truman."

On March 15, my opponent proposed that the South "persuade the Democratic Party to drop President Truman and unite behind General Eisenhower as its only hope of winning the Presidential election this year."

On March 23, my opponent wrote Boss Flynn in the Bronx:

"Let us face the hard, cold facts. Harry Truman cannot be re-elected and will not be.... Most Southerners like myself would not and will not vote for a Republican but will
insure the election of a Republican by casting their votes for some Democrat other than Truman if he be the party nominee. I will not support a Republican... nor will I support Mr. Truman."

On May 7, my opponent wrote National Committee Chairman McGrath:

"In South Carolina I could not possibly raise one Confederate dollar for the national Democratic Party as presently constituted. There is not money enough in South Carolina or the United States to elect Harry Truman with the principles he advocates."

On May 16, my opponent said: "A choice between Truman and a Republican is the choice between Satan and Beelzebub. The 13 Southern states have 27 percent of the votes (in the House of Representatives if the election went there.) The Democrats would hardly be in a position to win without them, and they would be in a position where they would have to bargain with us. That may well happen."

On July 7, my opponent said: "It is not a question of whether we shall repudiate Truman or not. Already we have repudiated him irrevocably. The party has no confidence in his ability.... If Truman persists in running and successfully captures the nomination, history will record him as only a stubborn little man who, through the machinations of political henchmen,
defied his party and the American people."

On this same day, July 7, my opponent said:

"We are certain to have a new President in January. I hope it won't be a Republican, but the incumbent incubus (meaning Truman) will be on the outside looking in."

On July 8, my opponent said: "Anybody will be better than Truman."

On July 12, in Philadelphia, my opponent said:

"I am not saying what I will do in the general election."

On July 19, Time Magazine, reporting on the meeting of the Democratic National Committee at which my opponent had said he would offer a resolution asking Truman to withdraw, said:

"South Carolina's Olin D. Johnston, bitterest of the Truman haters, surrendered abjectly. For weeks he had trumpeted a demand that the National Committee ask Truman to withdraw. But when the committee called him to hear his protest, Olin Johnston had not a word to say."

On August 19, my opponent predicted that a court fight would follow if the State Democratic Executive Committee named electors instructed to vote for the States Rights ticket.

On November 2, around 11 o'clock, on election night, my opponent issued a statement in which he said:
"If you will check with the Democratic National Committee, you will find no one gave them more help than I did. I just want to keep the record straight. If you will call the Dixiecrat headquarters, you will find that I gave them no help."

On November 13, the press reported from Washington that "members of the Democratic high command could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw the junior Senator from South Carolina standing on the platform at the Union Station flashing a victory smile as the President's train, returning from Kansas City, rolled to a stop."

The Washington Post called Senator Johnston's presence a "strange sight." A well known Washington columnist said of my opponent that "with an agility that would make an electric eel seem apathetic, he has been sliding in and out of the party at strategic and photogenic moments," and that "Senator Johnston has been described as the first to leave the President and the first to return."

Strange indeed were the antics of my opponent in 1948. He raved and he ranted against Truman, he said he would break away from the Democratic Party if Truman were nominated. He expressed his approval of the plan the Southern Governors adopted to throw the Presidential election in the House of Representatives.
Then, lo and behold, after the Democratic Party of South Carolina had named electors against Truman, he flopped over, deserted the party which sent him to the Senate, and whose principles and policies he had sworn to uphold, and supported the election of the man who is now trying to destroy our way of life in the South.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I would follow a zig-zag course like that—before I would go back on the people who elected me to office—I would withdraw from public life and never show my face again in a political campaign in South Carolina.

And don't forget this. After Truman won, my opponent then began conniving with the Truman Pendergast gang to capture control of the Democratic Party of South Carolina. Being the Trumanite that he is, he held conferences in his office and schemed with the Truman leaders to capture the state party at its convention last April.

The Democrats of South Carolina met them at the club meetings and the county conventions. When the state convention was held, my opponent and his Trumanite friends could not muster enough votes to even put up a fight. We adhered to the stand that our State Party took in 1948, and overwhelmingly voted that there will be no retreat. And on July 11th in this election, the people who make up our party will have their say at the ballot
box, and will terminate their trust in a man who deserted the
party of our State and the institutions of our people in their
most critical hour.