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Statement at Senate campaign meeting on public education

Strom Thurmond

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I want to discuss with you today something close to my heart and that is public education. For six years I was a school teacher and I have never ceased to take an interest in the youth of our state. We owe to our boys and girls our first obligation.

In my inaugural address, I outlined a broad and comprehensive program to improve education in this state. The General Assembly responded to most of my recommendations and let me tell you some of the things we have accomplished for public education in South Carolina during the last four years.

Funds provided for public schools have been increased from $17,610,000 in 1946 to $32,431,000 in 1950, an increase of nearly $15,000,000.

Teachers' salaries increased an average of 60 per cent.

Nine months state-supported school term enacted into permanent law.

School survey conducted to ascertain best program for further improving South Carolina public school system.

Provision made for reorganization of school districts in the interest of improving school curricula, increasing efficiency and getting more for the school dollar.

State Department of Education reorganized to promote efficiency and provide better educational service. Division of school house planning re-established.

Increased funds made available for public schools, state colleges, adult education, Negro education, Vocational training, libraries and pupil transportation.

Provision made for training not heretofore available for South Carolina students in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science through regional education plan which Governor Thurmond supported and advocated in Southern Governors' Conference.

Time extended for teachers to come under retirement system and provision
made for state payment of county school superintendent's salaries.

During my administration, South Carolina will spend almost four times as much for public education as was spent during my opponent's four year term as Governor.

The salaries of our school teachers are almost three times higher now than when my opponent left the Governor's office.

The increase in our state appropriation for public education in 1950 over 1946 is greater than all the federal aid which would come to South Carolina if the federal government should embark on the proposed new program to subsidize our public schools.

Because of my interest in public education I at one time favored federal aid. But when I saw the trend of the federal government under the present administration, I realized that it would be dangerous if we permitted our schools to be subsidized from Washington. When I read the decision of the Supreme Court that it was the duty of the federal government to control what it subsidizes, I resolved then and there to change my position.

I went before the teachers in their state convention last Spring and told them why I thought they would make a mistake if they continued to advocate federal aid.

My opponent in this race has sought to gain votes by going over the state saying he was for federal aid without federal control. He knows full well that there can be no federal subsidy for our public schools without federal control. Furthermore, he should know that the man he supported for President is doing everything in his power to break down our segregation laws and he would use these federal funds to bring about a mixing of the races in our public schools. That is exactly what he did with the housing subsidy funds and my opponent knows it.

If the recent Supreme Court decisions on segregation and what is now going on in Washington does not convince us that we should look to our state
government instead of Washington for further improving our public schools, then I think we are sticking our heads in the sands and refusing to see. Some of our teachers are being misled by their national leaders in Washington. The federal government is operating $6,000,000 in the red and a government in that condition cannot embark on a costly federal aid program to the states when most of the state governments have a balanced budget.

Another thing, there are those in Congress who are not going to permit a federal aid bill to pass unless it also benefits church schools. There are those who are certain that even our present Supreme Court would declare such a bill unconstitutional.

Even if the federal government were not in the red and should embark on a costly program to subsidize public education throughout the United States, it would only be a short time before a legislative rider or executive order would be attached whereby none of the funds could be used in states which practice segregation. Therefore we in South Carolina would be sending our tax dollars to Washington for public education and could get none of them back because we are not going to break down segregation in our public schools in South Carolina.

Therefore as one who has been a public school teacher and a county school superintendent, and who as Governor has promoted education to the highest level in the history in South Carolina, I appeal to our people, and especially to our teachers, not to be misled by those who want to centralize control over our public schools in Washington.

If our people will continue to elect progressive men and women to the legislature and state offices who are interested in education, we can provide the revenue necessary for the continued development of our public school system and not run the danger of breaking down our system of segregation and having control of our schools pass from our local school board to some bureaucrat in Washington.