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Address at opening of the Southern Governors' Conference

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS BY J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE, AT OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 27, 1950, FORT SUMTER HOTEL, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA.

I am deeply gratified today to extend the hearty welcome of the people of South Carolina to the members of the Southern Governors' Conference. I hope that when you leave us, it will be with the knowledge that our hospitality is as real today as it has been ever since Charleston was founded nearly 300 years ago.

One of the greatest honors of my life has been to hold the chairmanship of this Conference, and I shall leave the position this year with an abiding sense of a richly rewarding experience marked by noble and pleasant associations.

We meet today in an atmosphere of impending danger to our great nation. At no time in the past five years has the threat of another world war seemed so real. We are faced with the unpleasant prospect that Soviet Russia has apparently entered upon a scheme to drain off our military and economic resources by nudging her satellites into acts of aggression while remaining aloof herself.

Our one consolation at this moment is that the Korean war, with its awful sacrifice of American lives, has demonstrated...
that the members of the United Nations can and will back up their
declarations for peace with military might. This is one of the
most significant developments of our century, and we may now
confidently hope that we have taken a long step toward the outlawing
of war.

The recent trend of world events has forced us to
re-examine our state of preparedness for all-out war. Twice in our
life-time we have seen our state of unpreparedness endanger the
very existence of our way of life. Broad oceans and a kind
Providence have twice given us time to prepare, but in this age
of atomic weapons, and biological elements, planes that fly faster
than sound and may soon reach 2,000 miles an hour, and rocket
missiles which may be launched from one nation to another at far
greater speeds, we cannot hope to have time for preparation if war
breaks out again.

In the light of this certain knowledge, an adequate
civil defense program must be a paramount concern of the states.
It is hoped that the present conference will shed new light upon
that urgent subject. For the nation as a whole, we must insist
upon immediate action for better preparedness. Such a program
should include a plan for total mobilization of all our resources;
effective fighting forces for ground, sea, and air; the adoption
of universal military training for adequate preparation of our fighting men; acceleration of scientific research; a more effective intelligence system; the coordination of foreign policy with military policy; an effective plan for total hemispheric defense; complete support and development of our merchant marine; more adequate stock- piling of strategic materials; decentralization of industries for greater protection; and efficient control of subversive activity which can lead to sabotage.

Supplementing these military measures should be the continued encouragement of production methods which counted so heavily for us in World War II. The production genius of America should be fully alerted to the immediate possibility of large-scale war, so that its powers may be turned upon a full war economy with no loss of time.

In this latter effort, the role of the states in the Southern Governors' Conference can and will be a far greater one than it was at the beginning of the last war. Southerners have always unreservedly responded to the nation's calls to arms with courage and patriotism. Because of the vast production needs of World War II, we found that our home front potential was no less important. The war plants which spread out over the South realized the possibilities of a wealth of resources and native ability which the nation did not know we possessed.
It is apparent today that the South's industrial potential is going to be realized to the fullest, whether for peace or war.

It may truly be said that the South is leading the nation in the march of progress. In the fields of agriculture, commerce, and industry -- the foundation stones of our economy -- the states from Maryland to Texas are gaining more rapidly than any other region of the country.

The South is no longer "the land of yesterday." It need not even be called "the land of tomorrow," for it is already a changing South -- a land of today, of challenge being met and of opportunity seized.

Despite the overwhelming obstacles of a devastating war that was followed by one-sided tariff restrictions and discriminatory freight rates, the South has waged a successful uphill struggle to cast off her colonial status and to achieve a balanced economy. The courage, energy, and ability of our people, combined with our great natural advantages, have brought us close to the day when a balance between agriculture and industry will make the southern states the envy of the world.

We may find new confidence for the future in the fact that we are winning our battle for equalization of freight rates.
Removal of this barrier has been a primary objective of the Southern Governors' Conference since its inception, and it is gratifying to realize that our goal is now in sight.

With this barrier on the way out, business and industry are turning southward in ever-increasing numbers. In almost every field of endeavor, the South has set the pace for the nation during the past decade.

In 10 years, the 15 states of the Southern Governors' Conference have enjoyed an increase of approximately 100 billion dollars in total business volume. This was an increase of 350%, compared with an increase of 300% in the other states of the nation.

During this decade, sales of utilities increased 400%, compared with a 300% increase for the other states. Life insurance sales were up 157%, compared with 126% for the nation. Business telephones increased 113%, while they increased only 74% in the nation as a whole.

The most impressive increase of the decade was in manufacturing. The Southern states increased their sales of manufactured products by almost 28 billion dollars, a 500% increase compared with a 350% increase in the other states of the nation.

In 10 years the South's industrial growth was 44% -- 14% higher than that of the nation.
Our own State of South Carolina has recently reached a position near the top in industrial gains. In value added by manufacture, South Carolina registered an increase of 370%, compared with a national average of 20.4%. In South Carolina during the past four years, we have witnessed the coming of new industries and expansions costing over $25,000,000, which have created for us 50,000 new jobs and $100,000,000 annually in new payrolls.

Industry has many good reasons for turning southward.

We have a mild, healthful climate, making for better working efficiency, with a good distribution of rainfall throughout the year. We have a plentiful supply of friendly, capable, energetic people who are outstanding producers, easily trained. Our tax structures are generally favorable to industry, and our state governments are stable, helpful and hospitable. Costs of operation, including plant sites, construction, and power, are generally lower. We have an abundant supply of raw materials, such as cotton, forest woods, clays, sand, and minerals. And finally, the South offers the nation's most promising market for industry's goods.

Because of all these advantages, the South may expect its industrial growth to continue with little change over
the next few years. A survey published last year showed that industry had completed plans to spend 41 billion dollars for expansion by 1954, and that the total capacity of industry will be increased about 50% in the next decade. The South's share of this expansion should be substantial.

Recent revolutionary changes in our agricultural life fit remarkably well into this picture of industrial expansion. Farmers are gaining ground in their battle to conserve and improve their soils. Crop yields and quality are improving. Cotton and tobacco systems of farming are being balanced with livestock. The one-mule farmer is being replaced by an efficient business man who operates modern farm machinery and equipment.

Acreage devoted to cotton in the South has been cut almost in half, without decreasing total production of the crop. The land taken from cotton has been put into production of food and feed crops, and as a result, a new "king" is rising on the southern scene. His name is "Livestock".

Twenty-five years ago, only about 20% of farm income in the southern states came from livestock. This figure has now grown to about 40%.

Many agricultural leaders believe the South can find a new source of wealth in livestock production. Our pastures are
good the year round. Livestock can harvest the pasture crop
themselves, saving labor, reducing costs, and enriching the land.

These agricultural changes have brought greater returns
to southern farmers, and farm cash income has more than tripled in
the South in the last 10 years, increasing much faster than it has
in the other states.

This new farm prosperity, coupled with new business
and industrial payrolls, has brought us rapidly rising incomes. The
15 states of the Southern Governors Conference during the past 10
years, enjoyed an increase of 180% in per capita income, compared
with an increase of 146% for the nation as a whole.

The average man in the South has more money to spend
today than he had 10 years ago, and that means that he can pay
more taxes and support better state services. As tax sources
increase, Southern state governments are assuming greater burdens
of public service in education, health, welfare, and the like.

Education is a good example of this trend. In 1939,
the 15 Southern state governments were paying about 45% of the cost
of their public schools. Last year they were paying more than 57%
of the school costs. By comparison, the average state government
in the nation is carrying only 42% of its school burden.
The southern states as a whole have occupied positions near the bottom in many national ratings in past years, but this picture is changing rapidly. As our income rises, our state governments quickly reflect the demand of their citizens for increased services.

On this newly-found road to high standards of living, the southern Negro is marching upward alongside his white friends. Economic under-privilege has known no color line in the South, and opportunities to improve and progress have been limited in the past for both races.

I venture to say that in the first half of this century the progress of the southern Negro, with the assistance and encouragement of his white neighbors, has been greater than that of any race of people in world history in a similar period. In 1900, only 31% of the Negro population of school age was attending public schools. In 1940, that percentage had more than doubled, and the latest census will show even greater gains.

In the matter of sanitation and health, the southern Negro has made even more impressive progress. Infant and maternal deaths have been steadily declining since 1900, with particularly sharp decreases in the past two decades. In 1900, the average Negro had a life expectancy of only 33 years. Today, he may expect to
live to the age of 60, and his life expectancy has forged ahead much faster than that of white people.

We have been especially successful in combating the diseases which 50 years ago took such a high toll of Negro life in the South. Tuberculosis, pellagra, malaria, and typhoid — all of which are encouraged by an unwholesome and unsanitary environment — have shown remarkable decreases since 1900, demonstrating what sanitation, better care, and education can do.

In past years, because of the South's poverty, the Negro as a taxpayer has been able to contribute little to the public services upon which his progress depends. Today, he is finding everywhere in the South new opportunities which eventually will enable him to carry his share of the burden.

An illustration of improvement in the economic condition of the Negro race may be found in the occupation of farming. In South Carolina, all Negro farmers began 80 years ago as tenants or share-croppers. Today, many of them own their farms, and many others are buying them. The last farm census showed nearly 18,000 Negro farm owners in South Carolina. Of all owners, 31% were Negro, which is a high percentage when you consider that the proportion of Negroes in our population is 42%.

In other occupations the story is very much the same. One young South Carolina Negro operates a large funeral home, a
taxicab business, a filling station, a grocery store, several public buses, a night club, and a farm. Many others have been successful in business enterprises in recent years.

The great tragedy of our day is that agitators from outside the South have violently distorted the facts of the Negro's progress to serve their selfish ends, and that they have sought to use him as a minority bloc voter in an effort to control elections within the states. Our people and the nation must be made aware of this political trickery. We must avoid minority blocs controlled by outside leaders dominating our elections, else our progress in the South will be dealt a crushing blow.

It was the Southern Governors' Conference which spearheaded the movement against the so-called Civil Rights Program. Meeting in Tallahassee in 1947, the Southern Governors sounded a clarion call for the people of the South and the Nation who love freedom and Constitutional government to unite against this iniquitous program. The fight against this betrayal of the South by the Democratic Party was carried to the Philadelphia Democratic National Convention and into the 1948 Presidential election. The seeds we sowed are now bearing fruit. The people are beginning to realize the dangers to our form of government which lurk in the President's Civil Rights Program. If the President has the political
sagacity his friends credit him with having, he will correctly read
the election returns of 1948 and follow the advice of James A.
Farley by abandoning his Civil Rights Program, which breeds
disunity at a time when we need unity.

Both our races are set back every time there is radical
agitation of racial problems. It is our hope that most southern
Negroes will not listen to these false leaders and that they will
realize their best opportunity for progress is a continuation of the
harmonious cooperation which have brought both races so far along the
uphill road.

Upon this cooperation depends our realization of the
dream of a "New South" -- a South of opportunity and high standards
of living for both races.

There have been many "New Souths". There was the New
South of the adventurous English, French, and Spanish, who saw in
it a treasure trove to be looted; there was the New South of the
land-grant holders, who made of it a vast and luxuriant plantation
to be exploited by slave labor; there was the New South of the great
resident planters, who created from it a new and more gracious way of
life; there was the New South of the carpetbaggers, who saw in it a
gigantic opportunity to steal and plunder; there was the New South
e visioned by Henry Grady, Wade Hampton, and others who sought to
build a quick new world from the ashes of the old, a world which was destined to remain unborn for many decades; and, finally, there is the New South of today, a living, moving, growing, changing South that is fast justifying the faith of the millions who have staked their lives on her promise.

It is our confident belief that this New South will soon come into her own, and take her rightful place in the great economic balance wheel of the nation's life.