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Time For Alertness

Strom Thurmond

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A TIME FOR ALERTNESS

By J. Strom Thurmond
Governor of South Carolina

Occasionally, while reading my daily paper or listening to a news broadcast, I am struck with the realization that the problems of our world today are not only manifold and complex, but that they are changing in character almost hourly.

If an intelligent person is to keep in touch with the many difficult situations men are facing these days, he must not only attain a good grasp of each problem as it appears, but he must follow the "career" of that problem through many twistings and turnings every day.

The good American citizen had barely formed his collective opinion about the "A" bomb when the "H" bomb loomed on the horizon. He found this new development required a somewhat different approach, since the hydrogen bomb is potentially far more destructive than the atomic bomb.

It is the same with almost every national and international question. Our world is so complex that it is difficult for the human mind to retain an intelligent perspective.

That is why I believe that the problem of alcohol, and its effects on the human intellect, is a far greater one today than it has ever been. The problem is particularly acute for Americans, who have been thrust into a position of world leadership at a critical hour in history.

The very destiny of mankind is in the hands of
American diplomats, American department heads and officials, and American congressional delegates to the United States Senate and the House of Representatives. One may carry the point further by saying that man's destiny is in the hands of the American citizen, for the opinions and the desires of our citizens are reflected accurately in the Congress.

At such a time, mankind cannot afford fuzzy thinking and confused motives among Americans. The problem of alcohol, which contributes to both fuzziness in mental attitudes and confusion as to motive, is, therefore, a problem worthy of our most concentrated attention.

The free flow of liquor in diplomatic circles and in the back rooms of Congress, and the well-known proclivity of many Washingtonians to attend cocktail parties, are factors which cannot help mankind in his desperate search for a peaceful and prosperous existence.

By the same token, the consumption of alcohol at the citizen's level is a serious handicap in the struggle to find solutions to the world problems of the day.

A brain made sodden by whiskey cannot cope with the complex difficulties of modern life, and a brain which has been subjected to alcohol even in the smallest quantities is a brain with two strikes on it from the start.

In his book "Human Intelligence," Dr. Arnold Lorand pointed out: "Whether alcohol is used occasionally or regularly in large quantities, it will always affect the mentality.... Alcohol, even in small quantities and only in the form of wine, may reduce in many individuals the fineness in the perceptive power of the senses. I do not hesitate to express my opinion here, that
in mental work, particularly when it concerns the perception of delicate differences, even small quantities of alcohol may be embarrassing."

It is quite clear that an American who hopes to help his people find a way to peace would do well to take no risks with the mental impairment certain to follow the use of liquor.

This is a time for alertness. Every possible ounce of mental, physical, and spiritual strength is needed if Americans are to meet the challenge of world leadership.

A hundred years ago, when American civilization was largely agricultural, the consequences of alcoholic excesses were almost entirely limited to the victim himself and his immediate family and associates. There is no such limitation today. The complexity of the atomic age, with its rapid communications, heavily concentrated population areas, and mutual interdependence as between persons and between nations, has created a world in which the excessive use of alcohol may have a deadly and far-reaching effect.

Moreover, the stresses and strains of modern existence, with its speeding planes and cars, blaring radios, enticing movies, jangling telephones, and the like, often tempt the citizen to seek escape in the false security of alcohol's temporary oblivion. Since drunkenness is never a solution for any problem, the citizen who tries to escape with liquor merely finds the difficulties harder to face when he sobers up.

As one who has always been a total abstainer, I have had ample opportunity to see my own choice substantiated. During almost five years as circuit judge, I found that about 75% of the
cases coming before me were caused, directly or indirectly, from drinking. As Governor, my duty has included hearing criminal extradition cases, and acting upon the findings of our Probation; Parole and Pardon Board, before this power was removed from the South Carolina chief executive by a Constitutional Amendment which I recommended. In both these activities, I considered hundreds of cases involving applicants for mercy who blamed their difficulties on drinking.

F. B. I. Director J. Edgar Hoover says crime costs Americans approximately 15 billions of dollars a year. It would be difficult to estimate the percentage of this vast cost which may be attributed to alcohol, but we know it to be very high.

We know, too, that alcoholics in America now number about 700,000, and that about 1 in 50 who drink becomes an alcoholic. The alcoholic invariably involved himself and his family in a series of crises which usually require the attention of social agencies.

But the confirmed alcoholic is by no means the only problem. A tremendous waste in economic welfare and human happiness may also be laid at the door of the casual drinker. About half of all fatal or serious automobile accidents, for instance, are caused by drinking, not necessarily excessive drinking, either. The annual loss from this cause amounts to about two-and-a-half billion dollars, and every minute of the day, two persons suffer death or injury in such accidents.

As I pointed out to our General Assembly this year, the evil effects of liquor consumption may be seen on every hand—in fatal accidents, in numerous violations of the law including horrible sex crimes, in juvenile delinquency, and in broken homes.
To help combat this great human loss, I have asked for a tightening of our regulatory laws, and for a local option provision allowing those communities which desire to do so to outlaw liquor.

We have already accomplished a great deal in South Carolina in the direction of better regulation of the liquor traffic. When I came in as Governor, a 1935 law was still in effect which amounted to a wide-open liquor bill, and which had permitted a nefarious liquor ring to spring up commanding powerful political influence. I asked for and got a new regulatory law which now channels excess liquor profits amounting to millions annually into the State treasury. This law broke the back of the liquor ring and effectively curbed it. Since that time, liquor consumption has decreased about 50% in South Carolina.

Laws, however, cannot do the job alone. The need for education in temperance is equally as compelling as the need for adequate laws. We must recognize this need and meet it, if America is not to be hampered by a growing liquor problem in these critical times.

In directing our educational processes toward a better understanding of the value of temperance, I think we should emphasize a positive approach. Too much emphasis has been placed on the evils of drinking, and too little on the joys and pleasures of the temperate life. Those of us who have gone through life without alcohol know very well that drinking is totally unnecessary for a happy existence. They know that the artificial "lift" is not needed for social enjoyment. They know that the advantages of a healthy mind and body and a wholesome spiritual attitude far outweigh the temporary and false pleasures to be derived from a glass of whiskey, beer, or wine. Such advantages should be given
My wife and I have been life-long total abstainers. Also, we never serve alcoholic beverages at the Governor's Mansion, because we feel that the Executive Mansion should be an example for the other homes of the State.

My own strenuous schedule which frequently runs to 16 hours a day has taught me the necessity for an alert mind, a healthy body, and a confident spirit. Intoxicants have no rightful place in such a schedule. Alcohol is unnecessary to a full and enjoyable existence, whether in social gatherings or in the privacy of one's own home, and its use is not commensurate with the spiritual and religious values which are necessary to enrich and illumine life.