10-5-1954

Senate campaign speech

Strom Thurmond

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/strom

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. code). Use of these materials beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

For additional rights information, please contact Kirstin O'Keefe (kokeefe [at] clemson [dot] edu)

For additional information about the collections, please contact the Special Collections and Archives by phone at 864.656.3031 or via email at cuscl [at] clemson [dot] edu

Recommended Citation
Thurmond, Strom, "Senate campaign speech" (1954). Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100. 1121.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/strom/1121

For additional information about the collection, please contact the Special Collections and Archives by phone at 864.656.3031 or via email at cuscl [at] clemson [dot] edu

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Manuscript Collections at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100 by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.
Fellow Democrats of South Carolina:

As a Democratic Candidate for the United States Senate, I want to talk with you about the vital principle for which we are fighting in this campaign, and the problem which faces us on November 2.

The death of Senator Burnet R. Maybank was a heavy loss to our State and to the nation. Burnet Maybank served South Carolina in the United States Senate with great distinction. He was placed in the Senate by the people of South Carolina voting in a Democratic Primary, when the appointment of the Honorable James F. Byrnes to the Supreme Court by President Roosevelt left a vacancy in that office. Through his devotion to principle and his faithful service, Burnet Maybank won the universal esteem and affection of our people, and he was renominated in this year's primary without opposition.

Following Burnet Maybank's sudden and tragic death on September 1st, the State executive committee met on September 3rd, just hours after his funeral. That committee, by a vote of 31 to 18, refused to adopt a resolution which would have provided a Democratic primary for the people of South Carolina to nominate his successor. Instead, the majority of the committee transferred Burnet Maybank's six year nomination by the people to one of its own members who had not been nominated in a primary.

The committee nominee not only voted against a primary himself, as an ex-officio member of the committee, but also had his proxy as Committeeman from Barnwell County vote the same way. The committee nominee thus cast two votes against the right of the Democrats of South Carolina to hold a primary, and attempted to sew up the office of United States Senator for himself without a primary nomination.
In all this maneuvering, Barnwell County cast two votes, as many as any other two counties in the State put together.

By this maneuvering, and by politicking, confusing and misleading the majority of the State Committee, the Committee nominee and his cohorts took over Burnet Maybank's place on the ballot and printed his name where the people had placed Burnet Maybank's name. He now claims that every Democrat is obligated to vote for him just as if he had submitted his candidacy to the Democratic voters and gained their support in a party primary. Thus not only has the right of the voters to nominate their United States Senator been usurped by the majority of the Committee, but the Committee nominee now tries to deprive these same voters of their right of free choice. He claims that they are now obligated to vote for him in the general election by the Committee nomination in which the people were denied any participation.

On November 2, the committee candidate is going to find out that the people are not obligated to support him and furthermore that they are not going to support him in such a political maneuver.

The action of the committee violated a fundamental principle of representative self-government, and was taken in the face of Rule 35 of the Democratic Party which says plainly that a special primary shall be held in such cases if there is time before the general election. And everybody knows that there was time, as the general election was 60 days away. I repeat sixty days remained before the general election, and a primary could have been held. When Congressman Fulmer died in 1944, after his primary nomination but before the general election, only 19 days remained
before the election but a special primary was held, and the people nominated his successor.

No unprejudiced person seriously doubts that the Committee would have given the people a primary in the time that remained before election day. Nor does any unprejudiced person doubt that the Committee would have done so, but for the hard work that had been done on the committee members to give the nomination to the Committee nominee, without a primary. This was undemocratic, unAmerican, and deprived the people of this right of suffrage. But on Nov. 2 the people are going to rise up and disapprove the action of the committee in denying them the right to vote so that such a thing will never happen again.

The people of South Carolina are confronted with only two courses: They must either submit to and approve of this brazen denial of their right of suffrage in a primary, and thereby permit a dangerous precedent to be set in the future in the naming of office holders; or they must place their stamp of disapproval on the Committee's action by going to the polls on Nov. 2nd and writing in the name of the candidate of their choice. Such a write-in campaign and election is provided for by State law, and no committee can deprive the people of that right.

Several possible candidates were mentioned to lead this fight of the people. Since my term ended as Governor, I have been practicing law in Aiken, adjoining my home county of Edgefield. I had no plans to return to public life. But like the overwhelming majority of the people of S. C., I believed that a great principle of representative self-government had been violated by the action of the majority of the Committee, and that such action should be repudiated in no uncertain terms in the general election. This is the only appeal that the people now have from that action. I was willing to support any candidate
of principle who could and would lead this fight.

From every county in the State, appeals came to me to make the necessary fight. I was literally swamped with telephone calls, telegrams and letters, urging that I permit my name to be used as the write-in candidate. After talking with many friends and fellow citizens, including others who had been mentioned as possible candidates, I agreed to permit my name to be used, and promised to wage a vigorous campaign.

My first promise to the people was that, if elected their Senator in the November 2nd election, I would resign in 1956 in order that a Democratic primary for Senator, denied to the Democrats of the State this year, could then be held. This makes it crystal clear that we who are engaged in this campaign are fighting to uphold the principle involved, and are not merely concerned with personal politics.

In the 1956 primary, if we succeed in this fight to get that primary, any person, including the committee nominee, can submit his candidacy to the people. I expect to be a candidate for re-election in that primary. The voters will then have the right to choose me for re-election, or choose the committee nominee, or choose someone else who may desire to offer for the Senate. But I think the people are entitled to have that right of choice, and that right is what we are fighting to protect and vindicate in this campaign. Certainly so far as I am concerned, in common with all the great leaders of the Democratic Party of South Carolina in the past, I would not want to represent South Carolina in the United States Senate unless I knew I was sent there by the majority of the Democrats of our State in the free exercise of their full right of suffrage.
When you go to the polls on November 2nd and write in my name, you are in truth and in fact voting to have the right to nominate your United States Senator in a Democratic primary at the earliest date that one can be held. In the meantime, I will represent you in the Senate for the next two years and then return the office to you, the Democrats of South Carolina, to be filled by you in the regular 1956 primary for the balance of the term. Thirty-one members of the committee have refused to give you a primary now, and the committee nominee has declined to withdraw. He has even refused to debate the issues with me on the stump. He is determined to seize the office of U. S. Senator for a full 6 year period without a vote of the people. The Democrats of South Carolina disapprove this sly trick, and on November 2 they will go to the polls and repudiate this undemocratic action.

In asking the people to elect me as their Senator on November 2nd, I am deeply mindful of the grave responsibilities which this office carries. There is not a day that passes in which the lives of all South Carolinians are not affected in some way by what happens in Washington. A senator may at any time be called upon to cast a vote which may bring peace or war.

Because the United States Senate is the greatest deliberative body in the world, the voice of a Senator carries tremendous weight in shaping the policies of our government on the great national and international problems confronting the nation. This is the most important office within the gift of the people of South Carolina, and it is the duty of anyone
who aspires to that office to submit his qualifications.

I was born in Edgefield County, and graduated from
Clemson College in agriculture in 1923. I taught agriculture
in the public schools for 6 years, was elected superintendent
of education of Edgefield county in 1928, studied law in my
father's law office, and was admitted to the bar in 1930.
After serving 5 years in the State Senate, I was elected
circuit judge. I left the bench to volunteer for service
in the Army the day our country declared war against Germany
in World War II. I landed with the 82nd Airborne Division
in Normandy on D-Day, served under General Eisenhower in
Europe until V-E Day, and then served in the Pacific Theatre
under General MacArthur until V-J Day. When the war ended,
I returned home and resumed my duties as circuit judge. I
resigned from the bench in 1946 when I announced my candidacy
for nomination as Governor in a Democratic primary, and was
elected from a field of 11 candidates.

During my term of office as Governor, provision was made
for the reorganization of the state government; the State's
fiscal affairs were placed and kept on a sound and business-
like basis; new industries were brought into the State, re-
sulting in 60,000 new jobs with annual payrolls of $125,000,000
in wages; the pardon racket was ended permanently; the influence
of the liquor traffic in our governmental affairs was curbed;
the unconstitutional practice of dual office holding was
eliminated; great advances were made in our educational system,
and the highest teachers salary schedule in the State's history
up to that time was provided; the Industrial Commission was
cleaned up, better working conditions for labor were fostered,
and an era of almost complete freedom from industrial unrest was brought about; funds were provided for hospitals and health centers in the various counties; tremendous gains were made in the farm to market road paving program; rural electrification was vastly extended; and a state farm marketing system was inaugurated.

These and many other things were done during my service
as Governor, in giving to South Carolina honest, stable and
efficient administration of the affairs of our State government.
I challenge anyone to cite a single act of mine as Governor, or
in any other public office which I have held, that has been con-
trary to the best interests of the people of South Carolina.

On my record of public service I ask your support for
the Senate in this campaign. As Senator I shall continue to work
for the best interests both of our State and our Nation.

I shall work to restore a firm 90 per cent parity for the
farmers, and give my full support to maintain and strengthen our
farm program.

I shall continue the fine work which Senator Maybank was doing
in relation to public housing, and the development and conservation
of our natural resources.

I shall stand for full recognition and protection of the
right of collective bargaining between employees and employers.

As a soldier in the last World War, I shall lend my full
support to legislation to assure our veterans adequate hospitaliza-
tion and support for disabled veterans and their families.

I shall at all times vote in the Senate for the principles of
the Democratic Party of South Carolina as declared by our State
convention, and as a Democrat I shall vote with the other Democrats
in the organization of the Senate.
I shall work untiringly for a strong defense for America to the end that we may be able to maintain and enjoy peace.

I shall do all I can to strengthen the United Nations, as the best way of always keeping open the door to peace. I believe that partisanship should stop at the water's edge, and I will support a bi-partisan foreign policy as the best means of checking the spread of communist aggression.

In closing, I want to repeat to you that this is not merely a political campaign; it is a crusade for the vindication of the right of the Democrats of South Carolina to nominate their United States Senators and other office holders in primaries. The people have the opportunity and power on Nov. 2, to uphold that right and repudiate forever the committee action which took it away from them this year. I call upon every South Carolina Democrat who believes in good and progressive government, and is willing to fight for his or her right of supprage to go to the polls on election day and write in my name as your choice for United States Senator. I will value your confidence and respect your trust throughout my service in that high office, and you may be assured that I will give to South Carolina the kind of representation and leadership in the Senate which will reflect credit to our State and accomplish results for our people.