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Senate campaign radio speech

Strom Thurmond

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The right of the people to vote for those who govern over them is the most cherished privilege of a free people. An attempt is being made to take that right from the people of South Carolina in the election of a United States Senator.

I want to talk with you a few minutes vital about this issue which now confronts every South Carolinian in every walk of life.

Following the tragic death of your friend and mine, Senator Burnet R. Maybank, on September 1, the State Executive Committee met in Columbia on September 3, just hours after his funeral.
That committee, by a vote of 31 to 18, defeated a resolution which would have given the people a Democratic primary to nominate Senator Maybank's successor. Instead, the majority of the committee transferred Burnet Maybank's six year nomination by the people to one of its own members.

The committee nominee not only voted himself as ex-officio member of the committee against a primary, but he also had his proxy as committee-man from Barnwell County vote the same way. Thus we have the spectacle of the committee nominee casting two of the 31 votes against the right of the people to have a primary, and which resulted in his own nomination for the Senate by the state committee.
In depriving the people of a primary to elect their senator, the state committee violated Rule 35 of the Democratic party, which plainly says that a special primary must be held in such cases if there is time before the general election. The committee nominee and associates attempt to brush away Rule 35 of our party by saying there was not time for a primary. There were 60 days to hold a primary when the committee met and everybody knows this was sufficient time. As a matter of fact, a primary was held in 1944 to fill the vacancy of Congressman Fulmer when there were only 19 days between his death and the general election.
The people of South Carolina are not going to stand for that kind of political trickery. Every unprejudiced lawyer in South Carolina knows that the committee could have ordered and held a legal primary, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Governor Byrnes, the Attorney General, and the most outstanding lawyers of the State have publicly stated the committee could have legally held a primary.

Every unprejudiced political observer in South Carolina knows a primary would have been held had it not been for the hard work and lobbying done on members of the State Committee which began the very day of Senator Maybank's death and which was done for the purpose of securing the nomination for one man and one man alone.
The committee having denied to the people a primary to nominate their senator, the committee candidate now tells the Democrats of South Carolina they are under obligation to support him in the general election as though he won his nomination from the people in a primary.

No Democrat is under any obligation whatsoever to support the Barnwell County candidate because he holds a paper shell nomination from 31 members of the state committee. The people are supreme in the Democratic party of South Carolina, and Democrats are obligated to support only the nominees of a primary. Not since 1896 have the people of South Carolina been denied the right to select their United Senator in a primary.
As one who has stood for honesty and fair play in elections, I was shocked that any committee/ would undertake to deny the Democrats of our state/the right to elect a Senator and arrogate to themselves the right to give a six year term in the United States Senate/to one of its own members.

Since I left the Governor's office in 1951/I have been out of politics. and devoting my time to the practice of law. I had no desire to return to public life at this time. But when it became apparent that my friends all over South Carolina, and the people generally, wanted me to lead this fight for democratic and representative government, I could not turn down their call.
To make crystal clear that we are fighting for a great principle in this campaign, I have publicly announced that, if elected, I will resign in 1956 so the Democrats in a regular primary in 1956 may nominate their senator for the remaining four years of the Maybank term. A primary must be held under the law in 1956 and no committee can then by-pass people. I will, of course, run for reelection in that primary. Any Democrat, including the committee nominee, can be a candidate. That is the democratic way of holding elections by the Democratic party of our state and we intend to return to a primary at the first opportunity given us.
When you go to the polls November 2 remember this: A write-in vote for Strom Thurmond is a vote to elect me Senator for two years and then we will have a primary in 1956 for this office. A vote for the Barnwell county committee candidate is a vote to approve the action of the committee in denying the Democrats of South Carolina a primary and on a basis of a nomination by 31 men, send a man to the Senate for six years.

The United States Senatorship is the most important office in the gift of the people of South Carolina. It carries with it grave responsibilities and tremendous opportunities for service. It is not a job to be bartered away by ring politicians in a smoke filled room.
I am asking your support for the Senate on the basis of my record of public service as a State Senator, Circuit Judge, and as Governor of South Carolina for four years. My service in the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of our state government has given me a broad understanding and appreciation of the problems of our people in all sections of South Carolina. My public service has not been confined to one county, one section, or any special group. I have served all the people in all sections of South Carolina and in all three branches of our government.

The experience you receive in such public service is essential if South Carolina is to have able representation in the Senate.
I was reared in the Jeffersonian school of democracy. My creed is equal rights to all; special privileges to none. My first loyalty is always been to the Democratic party of South Carolina. I challenge anyone to cite a single instance in my public life where I have been untrue to the democratic party of South Carolina. I am a democratic candidate for the Senate and will vote with the Democrats in the organization of the Senate. And no act of mine while I am a member of the United States Senate will ever be contrary to the platform and principles of the Democratic party as enunciated by our state convention.
As your Governor/I participated in four national governors conferences. I was chairman of the Southern Governors Conference, the only South Carolina Governor who has held this position. I am now President of the Reserve Officers Association, an organization dedicated to a strong national defense. I served with combat units in both the European and Pacific theatre during the last world war. In serving in such capacities as these/I have acquired much knowledge of our national and international problems/and made many valuable contacts, all of which will enable me to render greater service to South Carolina in the Senate.
My friends, if you are opposed to a small group of ring politicians attempting to take away your right to vote and elect your United States Senator, and if you believe by reason of my public record, my ability and experience I can ably represent you in the Senate, then I urge you to go to the polls November 2 and write in the name of Strom Thurmond as your Democratic choice for Senator.

I shall ever be grateful for your support. The door to my office at the Capitol in Washington will be open to all and not a favored few. I will work long and hard and with all the vigor I possess in serving you as your United States Senator. And I shall at all times conduct myself in...
And you may be assured of one other thing: I shall at all times conduct myself in the Senate of the United States, which will reflect credit and dignity to the state we love and honor.

Thank you very much.