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Introduction honoring Governor James F. Byrnes

Strom Thurmond

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There are so many things so well known about the man we honor here tonight that few things could be said which are not already familiar to all of you. However, there are several things, I am sure, the gentlemen who are to speak will talk about that all of us do not know about Governor Byrnes.

Often it is true that great men grow in greatness in direct proportion to the distance we stay away from them or they grow in greatness with time after they are no longer in the public eye. Governor Byrnes is not like either of these two kinds of men.

He is one whose greatness is realized even more when we are close to him. His ability and integrity have always stood unquestioned as he has been subjected to the constant scrutiny of critical appraisal throughout his career of 45 years.

It is true that time has enhanced our respect for him, but not because we have been looking back on some one no longer active in public life. It has been because, as he continued in public office, we have been better able to recognize the qualities covered by a simple modesty becoming one of such stature.

Governor Byrnes gave up world renown to return home and earn for himself greater recognition and greater appreciation by taking up the responsibilities of a critical period in South Carolina history.

Sometimes the facing of day to day problems, such as some of those which confronted him, was more difficult than the more remote and less tangible matters of world affairs. I am sure that he encountered no harder problems nor any less susceptible to solution than some of those he faced during the four years he served South Carolina as Governor.

I suspect there were times when he would not have been unhappy to have exchanged the Governor’s chair for a place across the table from old acquaintances who spoke in foreign languages.
But whether James F. Byrnes occupied a chair at the conference table in Moscow, in Paris or in London -- or whether he occupied the Governor's seat -- or sat on the Supreme Court -- or at the President's right hand -- or in the United States Senate, or in the House --, he always kept a perspective which many covet, but few attain.

Wherever he has been and whatever his mission, Governor Byrnes has had the thoughtfulness and has taken the time to remember those around him. He has made their problems his problems. He has made himself responsible for doing good for his fellow South Carolinians and for his fellow-men.

Many who attain high position -- yes, even greatness -- lose the relationship of friend to friend with the people they represent. But Governor Byrnes has deepened and strengthened the ties of friendship among the people of his native state, even though for long periods he seldom had the pleasure of seeing them and participating in the friendly relationships which he so deeply enjoys.

I hope that he will have the opportunity in the years to come to catch up on those moments he has given up in past years while he so unstintingly served his state and his nation.

END