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Review of 1955 legislation for radio-TV addresses

Strom Thurmond

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My Fellow South Carolinians:

I am glad to have this opportunity to report to you on some of the more important things which were considered and enacted during the past session of Congress. Since it was my first year in the Senate, it was an exceedingly busy session for me. I have tried at all times to give the same consideration to every individual and every group given to any other person or group.

In my opinion, the first session of the 84th Congress accomplished much good. The Senate considered and acted on approximately 1,300 bills and resolutions. These included virtually all types of legislation from bills concerning farm programs to resolutions on foreign policy.

A number of items of legislation were enacted which I considered of vital importance, and a number of other bills are still pending in the Congress which I believe should be enacted promptly.

Two of the bills still pending which I consider of great importance to South Carolina affect two of the largest segments of our population. One bill I refer to would restore 90 per cent of parity on the basic farm commodities and replace the sliding scale system put into effect by the Secretary of Agriculture. The other bill is the one I introduced with Senator Eastland which would provide for the fixing of quotas on textile goods imported from foreign countries and also provide for sale of our surplus cotton abroad.
The House has passed a bill to restore 90 per cent parity, and it is pending in the Senate Agriculture Committee along with a similar bill which I introduced in the Senate on February 8. Although the Agriculture Department has expressed opposition to this proposal, I am hopeful that the Senate will take the same action the House took and pass this bill, in spite of the opposition of the Agriculture Department. I believe the farmers of South Carolina and the farmers of the nation should receive adequate compensation and protection for the production of the basic farm commodities.

Hearings are scheduled this fall on the bill which I introduced to place quotas on textile products being imported from Japan and other textile-manufacturing countries; and, as I stated, this bill also would encourage the sale of surplus cotton for export. Sixty-one members of the Senate joined me as co-authors of this bill. It has a dual purpose. If enacted, it would provide protection to the people of the textile industry against imports from low-wage nations and also help the government and the cotton producer to solve the problem of our increasing cotton surplus.

Cotton growers, textile manufacturers, and anybody else interested in this bill will have an ample opportunity to present their views at the hearings scheduled before the next session of Congress. Your advice will help us determine the best form for this legislation to have the desired effect of protecting both our farmers and the people of our textile industry.
From the farmer through the textile manufacturer, our cotton industry is facing one of its most critical periods in history. The United States formerly exported about 60 per cent of all the cotton purchased in the world market. Now we export less than 30 per cent of the total, and we are in danger of losing even more of the market to other cotton-producing countries. Thousands of farm families have been seriously hurt by acreage reductions from 25,244,000 acres in 1953 to 17,096,100 acres in 1955.

My hope is that by enactment of appropriate legislation, we can improve the condition both of the farmers and of the people of the textile industry. I shall continue my efforts to secure passage of appropriate legislation to meet their needs.

During the past session, I introduced some 20 bills and resolutions, most of which received favorable action either directly or included in other legislation approved by Congress.

I would like to discuss briefly some of the progressive legislation which was enacted, and some which was proposed but not enacted.

Early in the year, the Agriculture Department raised the interest rate on disaster loans to farmers from three to five per cent. I introduced a bill to lower the rate back to three per cent and legislation to this effect was enacted.

Another bill to aid hard-pressed farmers and stockmen was the one which provides for a two-year extension of the
emergency loan program. The new law includes farmers and stockmen suffering from declining prices, as well as those hit by natural disasters such as droughts.

With Senator Russell of Georgia I co-sponsored a bill to allow additional acreage allotments of basic crops in cases where farmers had been stricken by natural disasters such as freezes, hail, etc. This bill passed the Senate but was pigeon-holed in the House. Approval of the bill would have given help to our peach growers who were wiped out for the year by the killing freeze.

I requested the Agriculture Department to study crop insurance for peaches similar to the tobacco crop insurance now in effect. Two conferences on this subject have been held between officials of the department and peach growers of the State.

Other farm bills passed by Congress cover numerous phases of farm needs. One established special livestock loans for two years. Another bill provided for Extension Service assistance to help farmers in low-income areas. Still another law revised the REA loan allocation system to make it apply better where it is needed. Two other laws approved by the Congress placed a greater degree of control over speculation in the commodity markets.

Another bill I sponsored was one to place farm veterans on a par with other veterans in securing GI loans for building their homes. I believe that the veteran in a rural area should have the same opportunity as one in the city. This provision was approved in a House bill which
came up for consideration ahead of the bill I introduced. Congressman Dorn and I both introduced bills to direct the Agriculture Department to establish a Southeastern Soil and Water Conservation Laboratory. I hope that favorable action can be taken on this bill, in spite of an unfavorable report by the Agriculture Department.

With the severe damage which South Carolina has suffered from hurricanes during the past two years, I was deeply concerned as to whether anything might be done to prevent similar damage in the future. With this in mind, I succeeded in having the Southeastern States included in a bill which provides for a survey of methods by which damage might be averted or lessened.

In consideration of persons under the wage and house law, Congress increased the minimum wage from 75 cents to $1 per hour. Although I do not believe it should be the responsibility of the Federal Government to control wages and
hours, I do not see how anybody can support their family on less than $1 per hour. I supported the increase, although there was no roll call on passage.

No changes were made in the Social Security laws, but several bills are pending in Congress. These bills would lower retirement age for women from 65 to 62 years of age; provide disability benefits to 250,000 workers above 50 years old; continue disability benefits for children after they become 18; and extend Social Security coverage to some groups not covered at the present time.

Although Congress approved an extension of the Housing Act, I voted against it. I believe that private enterprise can and is doing the necessary job and that we should avoid socialistic projects by the Government.

The Senate approved the construction of 135,000 new units of housing per year, but the House cut out all new construction and the conference committee finally agreed on 45,000 units.

Another costly program which I voted against was the foreign aid bill. If we are ever going to reduce taxes and balance the budget, we must make a start at the right place. This program has already cost us 57 billion dollars. The Government has borrowed this money from you -- the people -- and taken your taxes to pay you the interest on money which is being loaned to foreign countries.

I am in favor of aiding our friends in foreign lands who make an effort to help themselves, and where such aid is of mutual benefit to the United States as well as to the foreign country. But I am not
in favor of continuing to spend ourselves into deeper debt in an effort to buy friends abroad who accept our assistance but continue to go their own way.

I voted against the foreign aid program this year because I believe we should get full value out of any such expenditures. I do not believe we get full value if we hand out money freely without attaching some strings requiring the countries receiving aid to cooperate with us.

However, I am convinced that the United States has greatly strengthened its foreign policy in many respects. I advocated and supported the President's bill to improve the Reserve program for our military forces. The Reserve program had to be strengthened so as to keep us from having to increase our regular military establishment at great expense to the taxpayers. Several reservists can be trained and kept in readiness for emergencies at the cost of maintaining a single man on active duty.

I believe, too, that President Eisenhower has demonstrated excellent judgment in his negotiations with other nations. The firmness and yet friendly way he conducted himself at Geneva showed the world that the United States really wants peace and is willing to sit down at the conference table instead of fighting new wars.

Senator George of Georgia, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate, was a leader in our nation's efforts to make other nations respect our position as a leader among the nations. He lent his support to a bi-partisan program which gave the President a strong hand in dealing with the Russians. Senator George's support of the Formosa resolution and his backing for
ratification of treaties with Asian and European countries helped to make it possible for the United States to move from an era of cold war to an era of greater expectation for continued peace.

As a Democrat, I have stood with Senator George in matters on foreign relations because I believe that a united nation is essential, regardless of political party lines, if we are to present our strongest front to potential enemies. No one can predict what the Russians will do in the future, but I am convinced we have made great progress in our foreign relations under the leadership of our President and our Democratic chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. Also, South Carolina should be proud of the part Congressman Richards has played in strengthening our foreign policy in his role as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

One of the most debated pieces of legislation proposed in the past session was the federal-aid highway bill. As Senator Byrd, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, disagreed with the administration plan for the issuance of bonds to finance the highways I also disagreed. I supported the Senate version of the bill and I believe that financing should be done out of current revenue instead of by incurring additional obligations for payment of huge amounts of interest.

The highway bill was killed in the House, but I am confident that it will be revived and some version approved next year. We must provide adequate highways to meet our defense needs in the event of an emergency.
The subject on which I received the most mail and on which I spent a great amount of time was that of the tariff on textile goods. When HR-1, the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Bill, was first sent to the Senate from the House, it left the doors wide open for continued damage to the textile industry by permitting continued reductions in tariff rates.

I went before the Senate Finance Committee and proposed amendments to prevent such damage taking place under the new law as it later happened under provisions of the old law. The Committee approved the amendments and they were passed by the Senate and retained in the bill by the conference committee of the House and Senate.

I wish that we could have substituted the new law for the old one before the negotiations at the GATT conference which reduced the tariffs so severely.

As soon as the results of the GATT conference were known, I immediately introduced a resolution, which the Senate approved, asking the Tariff Commission to study the effects of the tariff reductions. If the Commission reports damage to our textile production, quotas could be invoked on imported textile goods from countries such as Japan where low wages keep production costs down and permit unfair competition with the United States. I wrote the President, too, calling his attention to the unfair reductions in the textile tariffs.

As I mentioned earlier, Senator Eastland and I have introduced a bill which would fix reasonable quotas on imported textile products, as well as help sell our surplus cotton in foreign countries.
As long as the problem exists, I shall exert every effort to bring about an equitable solution to it so that our textile employees and employers will not be discriminated against for the benefit of foreign countries.

Finally, I would like to mention the bill I introduced in the Senate which would curb the power of the Supreme Court and the courts of appeal in school segregation cases. I have received little help on this. My bill would leave full jurisdiction in the hands of the District Courts where the local matters could best be understood. I have become convinced that there are few members of Congress who are in accord with the views of South Carolinians in this matter. Or if they agree, they are afraid to support our position publicly.

The operation of the schools is a local matter and should be left to local boards and local courts.

I hope that all of our citizens will cooperate with local authorities in helping to improve the schools instead of trying to tear them down from the high standards which have been attained through great efforts and great expenditures.

Our public schools provide the means to attain the hopes of future generations. Everything should be done to preserve the schools and everybody should cooperate in this endeavor.

I am glad to have had this opportunity to talk with you about some of the important matters of concern to all of us. Let me know what you are thinking on any matter of interest to you. I shall try to represent you in such a way in Washington as to continue to merit the confidence which so many of you have been kind enough to express.