3-6-1956

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Strom Thurmond

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Recommended Citation
Thurmond, Strom, "Senator Thurmond resigns; praised by colleagues for service and fulfilling pledge to the people" (1956). Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100.
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Senator Thurmond Resigns; Praised by Colleagues for Service and Fulfilling Pledge to the People

SPEECH
OF
HON. STROM THURMOND
OF SOUTH CAROLINA
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES
Tuesday, March 6, 1956

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the body of the Record the text of an announcement I made in Columbia, S. C., the capital of my State, on March 3, 1956.

The announcement explains a promise I made to the people of South Carolina in the fall of 1954, when I entered the campaign for election to the Senate. It also explains why I have submitted my resignation to the Governor of South Carolina and will give up my Senate seat on April 4, in spite of the fact that more than 4 years remain of the 6-year term to which I was elected.

In the Democratic primary in South Carolina on June 12, I will be a candidate for the nomination of my party to enter the November general election to seek the approval of the voters of my State to succeed myself in the Senate for the remainder of my term.

Although the press has published my reasons for taking this action, I believe it appropriate that I should present this explanation to my distinguished colleagues. Many courtesies and kindnesses Members of the Senate, and I hope to renew my membership in this body if it be the will of the people of South Carolina that I shall do so.

There being no objection, Mr. Thurmond's announcement was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

News Statement by Senator Strom Thurmond, of South Carolina, in Columbia, S. C., March 3, 1956, ANNOUNCING HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE UNITED STATES SENATE

The untimely death of Senator Burnet R. Maybank came on September 1, 1954, just over 2 months before the General Election on November 2 of that year. Senator Maybank had been renominated in the Democratic primary without opposition.

If a special Democratic primary had been held to nominate a successor to Senator Maybank, the voters in that primary would have been bound by South Carolina law and by oath under State Democratic Party rules to support the nominee. A special primary was not held. Therefore, the Democrats of South Carolina were free to vote for the person of their choice for the full 6-year term in the 1954 general election.

Democrats everywhere called on me to lead a write-in campaign as their candidate for the Senate. The view of many political observers was that a campaign would be hopeless because of the difficulties of write-in balloting.

I believed the people themselves had a right to vote for a candidate of their choice to fill an office, especially since the term of office was for 6 years. I agreed to become a Democratic write-in candidate for the Senate seat left vacant for the term beginning in January 1955.

In the 1954 campaign I stated:

"This is a fight for principle. * * * To make the principle at stake crystal clear, I pledge to the people of South Carolina that if I am elected in the general election on November 2, I will tender my resignation in 1956 in sufficient time to let the Democrats of South Carolina nominate a United States Senator in the regular Democratic primary election that year, which is the earliest regular primary to be held."

On March 21 the State Democratic Convention will be held. One of its functions is to provide for a primary to nominate Democratic candidates for the offices which will be filled by the voters in November in the general election. Candidates who enter the primary must qualify between noon on March 22 and noon on April 5.

The time has come for me to fulfill my promise to the people of South Carolina. I have tried to choose a course that will be as crystal clear as the principle I upheld in the 1954 campaign.

Today I have delivered my letter of resignation to Governor Timmerman.

The text of the letter states:

"In keeping with the pledge which I made to the people of South Carolina during the campaign in 1954, and in order that the State Democratic convention can place the office I am to fill in the primary, I hereby resign as United States Senator effective on and as of April 4, 1956, and I respectfully request that you accept this resignation effective on that date."

The State convention can provide for a primary to nominate a candidate for the remaining 4 years of the 6-year term to which I was elected. The Democrats of South Carolina can have the opportunity of nominating the person of their choice on June 12. Any person who desires to enter the primary as a candidate has sufficient notice.

I shall be a candidate for renomination in the primary to succeed myself in the Senate.

My resignation was made effective April 4, the day before the closing of the book for qualification and before the campaign opens. Because of the unprecedented circumstances of the 1954 senatorial election, I would not want to have any advantage which might result from my holding office during this primary campaign.

My resignation will guarantee a free and open primary election for South Carolina Democrats. I believe the course I have taken in resigning, and in making this announcement a month before the effective date, fulfills to the utmost the pledge I made to the people in 1954.

The trust reposed in me by the people has been deeply appreciated, and I have tried at all times to reward this trust by exerting my best efforts on behalf of the State and the Nation.

Mr. McCLELLAN. Mr. President, I have just listened with much regret to the announcement just made by our distinguished colleague, the junior Senator from South Carolina.

First, I commend him for keeping and carrying out the promise to which he referred, which is the pledge of a great Senator of his State during the campaign in 1954 when he was elected. I think that is most commendable.

I think also it is appropriate for me, as the chairman of the Committee on Government Operations, on which committee the distinguished junior Senator from South Carolina has served since he became a Member of the Senate, to say that he is to be commended for the splendid work that he has done as a member of that committee. I cannot say I was surprised, but I was highly gratified, when Senator Thurmond was assigned to the Committee on Government Operations. He immediately evidenced a clear grasp of the legislative process. He has proved to be a most valuable member of that committee.

Furthermore, we who have observed him—and all of us have observed his fine work here in the Senate—are fully convinced that the junior Senator from South Carolina has the capacity and qualities essential to become a great Senator, an able representative of the sov-
Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I deeply regret that the junior Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Thurmond), has thought it proper to resign from the Senate; but I am consoled by the fact that I believe his absence will be only temporary, and I express the hope that it will be.

During my service in the Senate, I do not know of any Senator who has won for himself a more enviable position in the body. He has contributed in a most substantial way to the work of the committee, and above all, to the deliberations of the Senate, as well.

Mr. STENNIS. Mr. President, I, too, deeply regret that the junior Senator from South Carolina, because of the circumstances he has related, will not be with us for a while. I have found him to be a very active Senator. Although he has been a Member of the Senate for only a little more than a year, he has taken a very active part in the consideration of many of the major bills and other matters pending before Congress.

I have found the junior Senator from South Carolina a man of great sincerity. He is what I would call an effective Senator. That, after all, is the ultimate test.

I know of his great interest in military affairs, and especially of his wonderful knowledge of the Reserve program, and in the promotion of that program he has been active before the Committee on Armed Services. In his own State, also, he has been interested in the Reserve program, and in both branches of the military program. He has been most helpful to the members of the Committee on Armed Services.

I trust that in the course of a few months he will be elected to the Senate, so that he may continue his excellent service, and add new luster to the distinguished record he has already made.

Mr. EASTLAND. Mr. President, I certainly regret the resignation of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Thurmond), but I am most happy that he will be with us in a few months. I have never known a Senator in so short a time to make greater progress or to rise higher than has the Senator from South Carolina.

As my colleague (Mr. Stennis) stated, the Senator from South Carolina has been a very effective Senator. He is one of the most popular Members of this body. He is conscientious, his character and his patriotism is a great asset to the State of South Carolina.

I was privileged at one time, a few years ago, to support him for President of the United States, and I believe he would have made a very fine President, as he has made an outstanding record as a Senator.

Mr. CARLSON. Mr. President, I should not like the opportunity to pass without saying a word in reference to the statement just made by the junior Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Thurmond). I assume we on the minority side could well say that we would welcome having a Republican Senator from the State of South Carolina, but if such a hope cannot be realized, I sincerely trust the people of South Carolina, in their good judgment, will return to the Senate the present junior Senator from South Carolina.

I had the privilege of serving as Governor of the State of Kansas while the distinguished junior Senator from South Carolina was Governor of the great State of South Carolina. It was a pleasure to work with him then. It has been a pleasure to be associated with him and to work with him as a Senator. He is not only an able Senator but has been an asset to his great State and to the United States of America.

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I should like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the Senator from Virginia, the Senator from Arkansas, the junior Senator and the senior Senator from Mississippi, and the Senator from Kansas, for their kind remarks about my resignation. Again, I should like to say it has been a great pleasure to be a Member of the Senate with those gentlemen and the other Members of the Senate, and I shall greatly miss them.

Mr. MARTIN of Pennsylvania. Mr. President, I wish to join with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have expressed their high regard for the able and distinguished Senator from South Carolina, Strom Thurmond. I do so with the most sincere appreciation of his wholehearted Americanism, his brilliant career as a soldier, and his constructive statesmanship.

While we have not always agreed in our approach to the problems that have come before us, I have always been deeply impressed by his outstanding ability, his unfailing devotion to the public interest, and his loyalty to the principles for which he fights so courageously.

It has been my good fortune to be associated with Senator Thurmond on the Public Works Committee, and I cannot praise too highly his unselfish concept of public service that is not restricted by sectional limitations, but advances the welfare of the nation.

Senator Thurmond works with all his splendid qualities of heart and mind to build the defensive strength and power of the United States. His stand for a strong America embraces not military strength alone, but also economic strength and a higher level of spiritual and cultural strength.

He is a dynamic leader in military affairs. He holds the rank of brigadier-general in the Army Reserve, and has served as president of the Reserve Officers Association of the United States.

He is an active participant in a long list of organizations dedicated to civic, philanthropic, educational, and patriotic purposes.

The many honors that have been bestowed upon him by the people of his native State are richly deserved. They reflect a proud career of achievement in civilian life, as well as a proud record of honor and distinction in defense of our country on the battlefield.

As an old soldier, I can recall with the highest admiration his service in World War II, when he stepped down from the circuit court bench to volunteer for active duty. From our own country and from our allies he received numerous decorations for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy.

I am sure I voice the sentiments of every Member of the Senate when I say to our good friend and colleague that the announcement of his resignation, while not unexpected, brings us a feeling of sadness.

We wish him well. Our kindest thoughts will be with him as he goes back to South Carolina, which he so dearly loves.