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Address by Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) before Presbyterian College student body, Clinton, S.C., for Political Emphasis Week, 10:45 a.m., 1959 April 10

Strom Thurmond

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Our Changing Nation

It is always a pleasure to visit Presbyterian College, and it is a high privilege to have the honor to address the faculty and student body at this great institution. It is also good to be in Laurens County, where the people have always been so generous to me in my efforts to serve our State and Nation. I count many warm friends in Laurens County, Clinton, and at PC.

While I was Governor, I had the honor of appointing your very able President, Dr. Marshall W. Brown, as a member of the Southern Regional Education Board. Since that time Dr. Brown has proved such a good representative of South Carolina that he has been successively reappointed.

Presbyterian College has made much progress since it was founded in 1880 by that great servant of God and man, Dr. William Plummer Jacobs. The administration of Dr. Brown has upheld the lofty ideals and high principles Dr. Jacobs envisioned for this fine institution, and Dr. Brown’s service has proved especially successful and progressive for the college.

In recent years your enrollment figures have increased to a record high, academic standards have been raised, and your good all-around athletic program has proved very successful for a small college. The college is now undergoing a vast development program, which is lending more beauty and dignity to your campus, and the new and modern buildings being erected here will provide training facilities for generations yet unborn.

In this wholesome and literary atmosphere you have a unique opportunity to prepare yourselves for a rich life ahead. I hope each of you is taking full advantage of the short time you will be here.

PC offers a well-balanced educational program with the proper emphasis on mental, spiritual, and physical development and growth. I have always felt that too often the values offered by our small colleges, especially our church-supported institutions, are overlooked. The fact that PC is a small college, affords you the opportunity to obtain more individual attention in your classwork and studies, and a better opportunity to participate in the various athletic programs and
extra-curricular student activities. In a college this size you become acquainted, and develop lasting friendships, with practically everyone on the campus.

You also have at PC the opportunity to gain valuable training for possible military service as a reserve or regular officer in the Army. As one who has served on active military and reserve duty, I can testify to you that it is a privilege to be able to serve your country, in order to protect our nation's liberty and our individual freedom. Additionally, military training is invaluable in teaching discipline, and in developing leadership and other qualities of character.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity which PC places before you is the development of strong traits of Christian character. To my mind, the most valuable service a college can perform for any individual is contributing to the molding of Christian character. Therein lies the hope of our troubled world, and the happiness and ultimate salvation of each individual.

Since I last visited your campus, which was for Political Emphasis Week in 1955, one of the most distinguished and loyal PC'uns I have ever known has passed away. Coach Walter Johnson was one of my best friends and one of South Carolina's most beloved and valuable citizens. His memory will forever serve as a great monument to Presbyterian College, because Coach Johnson constantly exemplified the highest ideals of Presbyterian College in his coaching and teaching, in his work with young people, and in his faith in God. In fact, Walter Johnson was the epitome of what Presbyterian College stands for.

Presbyterian College can be proud of the large number of graduates who have made outstanding records of achievement, in law, medicine, the ministry, teaching, farming, industry, business, government and other fields.

One of your alumni who graduated in 1951 joined my staff in January, 1955, as an assistant. His thorough preparation, his outstanding ability, and his dedication to duty brought him one promotion after another. When my Administrative Assistant resigned to return to South Carolina to enter business, many people were recommended to me for this position. Most people felt I should select an older, more seasoned person of experience to fill this position of
such great responsibility. But having been deeply impressed with this young PC graduate, who was then only 27 years of age, I promoted him to be my Administrative Assistant. He is the youngest Administrative Assistant in Washington today, and, I think, the best. Presbyterian College can be proud of the splendid record of Harry S. Dent of St. Matthews, South Carolina.

On this my third address before your Political Emphasis Week programs, I am very pleased to have as my topic, "Our Changing Nation.' No subject concerns me more at the present time. In fact, it is like throwing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch to ask me to address you on this subject.

The idea is often expressed that we live in a changing nation, and indeed, a changing world. In this age of nuclear energy and space exploration, we are prone to emphasize changes at the expense of ignoring those things which remain constant. Preoccupied as we are with the material aspects of life, we are inclined to assume that nothing is unchanging. If we will subordinate our egotism for a moment of reflection, we can readily comprehend that changes occur only in things made by man, and that all other things remain the same.

Predominant among things unchanging is the Creator, Himself. Despite the fluctuating and fickle faith of mankind, God, in His Omnipotence, is constant. Similarly, God's creation remains constant, and it is only man's knowledge that varies. For instance, man has only recently abandoned the belief that matter can be neither created nor destroyed, but at the same time we learned that matter and energy are equated. Our knowledge has thus increased, but the laws of nature, instituted by God for the regulation of His universe, are unalterable.

Man, himself, was God's greatest creation. Although he has been given a soul, and the power of reason and choice, man also remains unchanging, as does human nature -- that combination of emotion and reason which govern his conduct.

Since the dawn of history, men have repeatedly established governments. Despite the fact that many governments were instituted for the establishment or preservation of individual power, and as such, were initially oppressive, man has always realized that the only noble purpose of government is to facilitate harmonious relations
among the governed. At its best, government is a servant of the people, a reasoned contract among men for their mutual conduct. To Government, man also turns for the conduct of matters which are equally paramount in importance to all the contracting parties, such as defense of all from a common enemy from without.

None can deny the usefulness of government as a means of self-enforcement of basic limitations of man's instinctive or emotional, as contrasted to his reasoned, activities. Unfortunately, the dangers of government are too often overlooked or ignored, for government is the most inherently dangerous to man of any of man's institutions.

Government is a basic instrument for good as long as, and only so long as, and to the proportionate degree that, it commands the respect and support of the people. Christ, Himself, ordained the pre-eminence of the individual, and the degree to which the individual can be subverted to the group, without destroying the individual, is slight. It is fundamental that the more areas into which government is injected, the greater is the probability of divergence of opinion, and the less popular is support of the government. Similarly, the more areas into which government is injected, the greater the concentration of power; and in the concentration of power, the subjugation and oppression of the individual most often occur.

It is a characteristic of humans that they are prone to ignore these basic truths. History shows that this human weakness is emphasized when man's attention is focused on material considerations. Changes in material matters lead man to mistakenly believe that he himself has changed, and that the time-proved concepts for the noblest governments are no longer sufficient for his egotistically imagined state of advancement. Ignoring the timeless and exceptionless history of governments, man seeks to obtain from government those things for which government was never intended, and that were ordained to be produced, if at all, by the individual. Such is the history of the rise and eventual decline or fall of the innumerable governments instituted by man.

It was a realization of these truths which prompted our greatest political philosopher, Thomas Jefferson, to proclaim, "That government is best, which governs the least." Jefferson believed
that the drafters of the Constitution were guided by this principle in molding that powerful document, for he said:

"The policy of the American Government is to leave its citizens free, neither restraining them nor aiding them in their lawful pursuits."

This statement assumes even greater strength when we realize that in Jefferson's day, the prohibitions of law paralleled, and only slightly enlarged on, some of the Ten Commandments. Jefferson termed "lawful" those activities which did not violate the "common" criminal law.

Jefferson has been pictured by modern historians principally as a dreamer. A dreamer he may have been, a philosopher he certainly was, but it was Jefferson the realist who recognized the inherent dangers in government, and the weakness in man, when he cautioned:

"If we can prevent the Government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them, they must become happy."

What have we done with the government of Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers? We have taken an instrument which was intended to circumscribe only the most basic essentials in human relations, and to provide for only the most common of purposes, and have bloated it into an awesome, octopus-like monster, with tentacles of control and regulation into every phase of our activity and conduct.

What was originally intended as the first line of protection for individualism, has become the principal weapon in this land for collectivism. What was conceived as an assurance of circumscription of only those emotional and abusive human impulses, has been contorted into a being within itself, uncontrolled in its dominance of the individual.

We have become dupes of our own egotism, deluded into believing that the principles enunciated by Jefferson, and embodied in the Constitution, were only for "horse and buggy days." We blissfully ignore the fact that the road we travel, is worn smooth by travel of egotistical generations who tread it before us. At the destination, some were oppressed by a single tyrant, some by a small group, and others by a slight majority of their numbers -- but the loss of individual freedom was the invariably painful result.

We must return to the realization, that there is no "security from the cradle to the grave"; that government affords no utopian road
to happiness; and most important of all, that man's destiny can be achieved only by an emphasis on the individual rather than through conformist philosophies.

The Government whose policy Jefferson contemplated as one which would "leave its citizens free, neither restraining them nor aiding them" now has a total of 13 departments; 16 commissions; 24 administrations; 23 types of government corporations; 711 offices; 96 services; 96 bureaus; 621 divisions; 45 boards and 471 miscellaneous or functional bodies. These are the tentacles, 2,116 of them, to which I referred.

This vast growth of our Federal Government with one or more handouts for virtually everyone and every segment of our population, has plunged our country into a quagmire of socialism and a public debt totalling approximately $284 billion. Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, the great fiscal expert and chairman of the Finance Committee, predicted in a speech last month that our debt would soon reach the bankruptcy point of $350 billion. At the conclusion of our present fiscal year on June 30, our Washington free spenders will have added more than $13 billion to our national debt. This marks the largest peacetime deficit in the history of our country.

The American public is ready and clamoring for restraint in Government spending. Too often, in answer to their clamor, the people are told that we must continue to spend in order to insure a strong national defense. There is some truth in the answer, for we must maintain a strong defense posture, regardless of the cost. I am not satisfied, personally, that we are spending quite enough in this vital field. Nevertheless, this is not a wholly true answer, for it is deceptive. It would leave the public to believe that we could not reduce overall spending drastically without endangering our defense posture. This is not true. The fallacy is well illustrated by the fact that defense spending for 1959 will be $4.3 billion lower than the 1953 Korean war defense budget, while non-defense expenditures for 1959 are estimated at $9.2 billion above the 1953 level. Also, non-defense spending for fiscal 1959 is to be increased over the previous year by $5.9 billion, against an increase of only $2 billion for defense purposes.

Spending can be cut without injury to our defense posture, by
reducing such items among others, as foreign aid, public housing and urban renewal, by declining to provide Federal funds for the fields of community facilities and area redevelopment, and by rejecting any increase in Federal aid to education. Even desirable programs should be postponed until Federal expenditures can be reduced well within our income. Special interest groups must not be allowed to sap the strength from our free enterprise system, regardless of their attempts to increase their doles from the United States Treasury and the taxpayers' pockets.

In addition to unnecessary programs, the Federal Government is wrapped up in red tape, duplication of efforts, and untold waste and extravagance -- all of which must be cut to the bone if we are going to live within our federal income, without increasing our already heavy burden of taxes. Our private enterprise system is being choked to death by high taxes, government interference, government regulation, government red tape, and government competition. If we can succeed in removing this stranglehold from the throats of our businessmen, we will witness the greatest expansion of our economic system the world has ever known. New and better jobs can be created, and our industries can increase our industrial output to levels that will make it impossible for the Communists to cope with us in the economic war, which Khrushchev and his comrades hope to win.

Furthermore, by resisting the change to socialism and by returning to the basic principles of Constitutional Government and our competitive free enterprise system, we can sound the death-knell of internal subversion and decay. Because of the Communist threats of the use of armed force, and the huge arsenal of weapons and personnel which back up these threats, many have apparently concluded that the greatest danger to our country lies from without. Nothing could be further from the truth -- and I make this statement in the face of the Soviet-created crisis over Berlin. The gravest danger to our country is from within, and our enemies' most powerful weapon is the complacency of the American people as a whole. The masters of the Kremlin realize full well the striking power of our nuclear retaliatory force, and they know that a nuclear holocaust would wipe Communism from the face of the globe. Should this occur, then Lenin's prophetic vision of making Communists "the grave-diggers, the heirs,
and the successors to the governments of the world" would never be possible of fulfillment.

At this point, let me make one thing crystal clear: Although the Communists have as their goal the downfall of democratic governments everywhere, their every indication points to the fact that they plan to take over our government from within; and if this approach does not succeed, they will then undoubtedly try to fulfill their goal by the use of destructive armed force. To cope with such a plan, there can be but one answer -- the maintenance of a strong national defense, included in which is a huge arsenal of destructive weapons calculated to deter aggression; a strong competitive free enterprise system, which will foster economic growth and progress and stifle any danger of internal collapse; and the will and determination of our people to control communist subversion at home.

Marx and Engels said that the simplest definition of communism was the abolition of private property. It matters not whether private property is abolished by force from without, or by taxes for so-called humanitarian and welfare programs of our own government, the end result is the same. In either event, socialism or communism is inevitably accompanied by abolition of individual freedom.

It is only fair and objective to realize that the complacency of the American people, which I have mentioned, is not entirely self-originated. Its instillation has been surreptitiously encouraged and nurtured by our enemies, and its growth unwittingly aided by some of our best intentioned leaders.

Our humanitarian instinct comprises one of our strongest national traits. It is our very humanitarianism, admirable and worthy though it be, on which our complacency is founded. By using a subtle, sometimes even subliminal approach, our enemies have enlisted our unthinking support of causes apparently for the promotion of "human rights," but which, when carefully examined, reveal an underlying advancement of collectivism. We find ourselves even more vulnerable to plans for promoting the economic welfare of all, or a particular portion of our people, at the instance of government. We are inclined to direct our exclusive attention to the purportedly noble purpose of the plan, but to ignore the threatened jeopardy to our individual freedom and the impracticality of utilizing the tool of government, in
lieu of personal and private initiative.

No program, no decision, no action, proposed to be undertaken by the Federal Government, should be free from the most careful scrutiny and logical judgment of each and every American citizen. Individual freedom and practicality must be weighed against not only the purported material benefit, but also against the practically probable benefits. Nothing should be accepted at face value, for only by laying aside emotional impulses and submitting each matter to a logical and objective analysis, can we avoid the pitfalls of collectivism.

By the Grace of God, we have been the beneficiaries of a constitutional republican form of government. Our forefathers drew from the wisdom of the ages, and from the foresight granted them by the Almighty in charting the framework for a government which allowed maximum control by the individual of his own destiny, while at the same time insuring to its citizens the functions which governments are best able to perform.

At this point, let me make it clear that the Constitution provides the framework which permits the operation of a free enterprise system. It is through the destruction of constitutional safeguards that our free enterprise system can be destroyed. Socialism is repugnant to the Constitution, and the former cannot exist if the latter prevails.

I do not mean to imply that the attack on our constitutional form of government has progressed beyond a point of no return. Despite the yoke of indebtedness and taxation placed on their necks, and the loss of individual freedom which they have suffered, the American people still hold a grasp on the power of control of their government. It is the very fact that the people do have it within their power to halt this assault on constitutional government, that causes me to conclude that complacency is the gravest threat to our continued liberty.

We are losing the war with communism and socialism. The battles we are losing are not on the beaches of Lebanon, nor in the Straits of Formosa, nor the encircled city of Berlin; rather they are in the court rooms, the halls of Congress and in the multitude of offices of the Federal bureaucracy. Not only is there little sign of resistance,
but our people appear oblivious to the struggle.

Each time the Supreme Court substitutes its judgment of what its members think is morally right, rather than applying the law as written, some large measure of individual freedom is destroyed. Each time the words of the Constitution are ignored by the Court, the Congress, or the Administration, they lose some of their potency. Every individual may not immediately be affected by every action of this type, but the particular right, left unprotected, may be the one you will badly need tomorrow.

Each time Congress votes a so-called benefit at government expense and control, individual freedom suffers a constriction. Government produces no wealth, and for each benefit there must be a charge. The individual produces the wealth, and he must pay the charge, not only in money, but also, and even more important, in the surrender of an individual right. When the government provides for you something you desire, it must be on the government's terms and conditions. Not only is the particular choice surrendered, but in the surrender, the power to choose is diminished from non-use. Thus is the philosophy of collectivism instilled in a people.

Each time a new Federal bureau is created, it is built to exercise a function previously exercised by individuals. For each new regulation issued, a higher degree of conformity is required; and collectivism, whether communistic or socialistic in appearance, exists through conformity.

Where is the spirit of '76, which sought not security, but opportunity? What has happened to the belief that each man should be free to pursue his own destiny? Where is the rugged individualism which, through free private enterprise, raised our nation to the highest and most luxurious standard of living the world has ever known?

Surely the love of these forces still exists in the heart of every true American. But in our fixation with material security and the threat of communism from without, we have left open the back door. We have relaxed our vigilance of the enemy in our midst, and have permitted our form of government to be changed, not through the constitutional process of amendment, but through the unconstitutional process of Federal usurpation of power.
I will never advocate opposition to progress or change out of fear to try the new or to lay the old aside. Any change, however, at the expense of individual freedom must be resisted by all who cherish liberty. Those who would halt the march to socialism, in our changing nation, must make their voices heard. The American people must be shaken and awakened from their materialistic and foreign conscious state of hypnosis. We are dangerously close to the point of no return. We should act now while we may, for tomorrow our liberty may die, and our power to act will be lost.