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Public Papers of the Presidents

Dinner for Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina

Remarks at the Fundraising Dinner in Columbia, S.C.

19 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1284

September 20, 1983

LENGTH: 2920 words

Senator Thurmond, Strom, thank you very much for a very warm and very flattering introduction. Governor Jim Edwards, Senator Baker, George Graham, Bill Cassels, Members of the Congress who are here, and all of you ladies and gentlemen:

I don't have the words to thank you properly for the welcome that I've had. I'm delighted to be back in your beautiful State -- the location that Sir Walter Raleigh described as paradise on Earth. And I'm delighted to be here, speaking for someone who is a true legend in his time. Strom Thurmond is a man of character, wisdom, energy, and leadership, and he's one big reason America is back on the road to greatness again.

He's a man of the people. His heart treasures those values that make us a good and loving people -- family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom. They say you can't live in South Carolina for long without meeting Strom in person. Not many can match his sense of responsibility to his State.

You know, it's been said that experience is the yeast of success. Well, take a look at the chapters in Strom's life. He's been a teacher, superintendent of schools -- he helped start the tech schools that transformed South Carolina from an agrarian to an industrial-based economy -- then a judge, major general in the Army Reserve, Governor, and now Senator, not to mention being a patriot, husband, father, and a kind and good man. Strom, I couldn't grab that many roles if I'd spent the rest of my life in Hollywood. [Laughter]

Maybe you'll understand why I say Strom is my friend, and I like him by my side giving me counsel and advice. And I trust the good sense of his friends. I'm confident that come November 1984, you'll send him right back to Washington to keep on doing a great job as your Senator.

And Strom, we're grateful to you for giving us one of your most talented and trusted advisers, the man who managed your 1978 campaign, Lee Atwater, from right here in Columbia.

Strom speaks with a voice of common sense, and common sense is about as common in Washington, D.C., as a Fourth of July blizzard in Columbia, South Carolina. [Laughter] There's a great sympathy in Washington for practically any scheme to spend money. But for years, Strom has been one of those lonely voices telling the awful truth: that government can only spend what it borrows or taxes away from the people. And hard-working people in South Carolina need higher taxes like they need a plague of locusts. You don't need to be taxed more; government needs to spend less.

We didn't go to Washington to raise taxes. We went there with a radical idea: to put this economy and the destiny of this great nation back in the hands of you, the people. And that's exactly what I think we've begun to do. With your support and Strom's, we came to the rescue of a nation whose house was on fire. We put out the flames and, brick by brick, we're rebuilding a foundation of strength, safety, security, and prosperity for America, and that's not bad for a new beginning.

Now, it's true, some people don't seem to like anything we do. Our opponents resist our budget savings. They oppose our tax cuts. And they complain that all their special interests have been hurt. Well, pardon me, but let them resist and oppose and complain, because I intend to remind the people the big spenders who saddled America with double-digit inflation, record interest rates -- as Strom has told you -- huge tax increases, too much regulation, credit controls, farm embargoes, no growth, and phony excuses about malaise are the last people who should be giving sermonettes on fairness and compassion.

I'm a firm believer in the need for bipartisan cooperation, especially in foreign policy where politics should stop at the water's edge. And sometimes we succeed. But there just isn't much sympathy among some there in Washington for reducing the tax burden on hard-working American families. And if the liberals in the Congress had their way, the American people would never have received any tax cut -- no first year, no second year, or, as the girl in the TV ad says, "no nothin'." If we had followed their blueprint for compassion, the average family of four would be paying, as Strom told you, nearly \$700 in higher taxes this year. And isn't it strange that we never hear a fairness argument that is framed that way?

But never mind, because that average family won't be paying the higher taxes some of those complainers on the Hill tried to pass. Thanks to the help of Strom Thurmond, his Republican colleagues here with us tonight, and a lot of responsible Democrats, we passed the first decent tax cut for every working American since 1964.

Despite all the threats from the other side, we kept our promise to the people. And we still have one more promise that must and will be kept. Indexing, an historic reform, will begin in 1985 -- it's already been passed -- so that never again will government be able to profit from inflation at your expense.

Now I'll be the first to admit that we still have a long way to go. But take a look around us. America is getting well, and she's getting strong. We've got a recovery train going. And rather than whine and carp and complain, the misery merchants should get on board and help us keep America moving forward. And if they can't do that, then let them get out of the way.

Inflation has plummeted by four-fifths, 80 percent, as Strom told you. And it's been under 2 1/2 percent during the past 12 months, and that's the lowest 12-month rate in more than 15 years. The prime rate is almost half what it was when we took office. Estate taxes on family farms and businesses are being cut sharply. Strom and I happen to believe widows and children shouldn't be forced to sell the family farm or the family business just to pay Uncle Sam, and now they won't have to.

Factory orders, industrial production, auto sales, and housing starts are up since the beginning of the year. Housing starts, we just learned yesterday afternoon, were up last month to the highest level since December of 1978. The stock market has come back to life and today hit a new record. Workers' real wages are rising for the first time in 3 years -- that's real wages, constant dollars. And while unemployment remains too high, we're putting people back to work across the country. Since December, more than 2 million of our fellow citizens have found jobs. More Americans are on the job than any time in United States history. We're moving forward again, and as Al Jolson used to say, "You ain't heard nothin' yet."

You know, you can recite all these facts and figures or you can use an easier way, a kind of a layman's way to tell our economic program is working: Our opponents don't call it Reaganomics anymore. [Laughter] You know, I never did call it that. I just called it America getting back on track.

Increasing housing starts, greater automobile production, rising personal income should be music to the ears of one crucial industry in South Carolina -- your textile industry. And no one in the United States Congress works harder for the textile industry than your Senator, Strom Thurmond.

Recognizing the importance of that industry to the national economy -- an employer of nearly 2 million people -- I told Strom our administration would seek to relate imports to growth in the domestic market. We believe progress is built with competition, keeping faith with the magic of the marketplace, but we also know there are times when exceptions must be made due to special circumstances in market conditions. And that's why we've continued to support the Multifiber Arrangement which gives us the ability to protect our domestic textile and apparel manufacturers within the international system.

Reflecting the concerns of Strom Thurmond, we've negotiated a series of bilateral agreements which are far tighter than any existing before we took office. Our new China agreement contains 33 categories of textiles and apparel, as opposed to eight in 1981. Where other threats to our import textile and apparel industry have appeared, we've tried to counter them. And as you know, we have much to do, and I pledge to you tonight, our administration will strive to work toward an ever closer relationship of textile imports and domestic market growth, consistent with our existing international obligations.

Strom, I hope the good people of your State won't mind if I also tell them what a determined and effective advocate you are for South Carolina's farmers.

Senator Thurmond and I share a very profound belief: We must preserve the American system of family farming. Strom has fought to protect the tobacco price support program from those who don't understand it. You know, talking about our family farms and what they can do -- every person out there is farming in America, feeding not only himself and his family but feeding more than 50 other people in the world -- there's a story that's going the rounds in Russia.

I've kind of become a collector of the stories that the Russian people tell each other which reveals their cynicism about their own government. And this story is just one of my favorites. The commissar goes out to one of their collective state farms, corrals one of the workers and says, "How is everything going? Any complaints?" "Oh," he says, "I've never heard anyone complain, comrade, sir." He says, "No nothing." "How are the crops?" "Oh," he said, "the

crops are wonderful, never been better." "Potatoes?" He said, "If we pile potatoes up in one pile, they'd reach the foot of God." And the commissar said, "This is the Soviet Union; there is no God." The worker says, "That's all right; there are no potatoes." [Laughter]

Strom personally traveled to Chicago on September 2d to meet with Secretary Block and discuss drought conditions in South Carolina and request appropriate aid.

And I can't finish these words about Strom without mentioning what I think might be his most important contribution not just to his fellow South Carolinians, but to free people everywhere. Strom Thurmond has been on the frontlines in our struggle to strengthen our foreign policy. He said some nice things about me on this, but he stands up for a strong national defense to make America second to none.

The debate on defense is about protecting lives and preserving freedom, because they're the source of all our other blessings. We both believe it's immoral to ask the sons and daughters of America to protect this land with second-rate equipment and weapons that won't work.

The savage Soviet attack against the unarmed Korean airliner reminds us we live in a dangerous world with cruel people who reject our ideals, who don't even understand them, and who disregard individual rights and the value of human life. We can only keep our families safe and our country free and at peace when the enemies of democracy know America has the courage to stay strong. And Strom and I intend to stay strong. And Strom and I intend to make sure they do. His leadership will be important on key appropriations votes that are coming up on defense and the MX.

And let me just add how much it meant to me when I returned to Washington after the downing of that Korean plane to have Strom over at the White House for advice and support.

But when we talk about defense, I think we should remind people what things were like back in 1980. Remember all those planes that couldn't fly, the ships that couldn't sail for lack of crew or spare parts, troops who couldn't wait to get into civilian clothes? One weapons program after another was being eliminated or delayed. America was falling behind. The free world was losing confidence in our leadership. But what we heard from our leadership was lectures on our inordinate fear of communism.

Well, just as we're turning the economy around, we're also strengthening the Armed Forces and bringing a new sense of purpose and direction to America's foreign policy. In the military, the number of combat-ready units has gone up by a third since 1980. The deployable battle force in the Navy has risen from about 480 ships when we took office to 510 today -- well on its way to our goal of 600. The percentage of new recruits with high school diplomas has risen throughout our Armed Forces. And since 1980 the reenlistment rate has gone up by more than a fourth. We're attracting better recruits. We're keeping them longer, because we're giving them better pay and better equipment and because we're giving them the respect and appreciation they've always deserved.

Let me just interject something here, because the last time I gave a speech in Columbia during the 1980 campaign I said one of the most important ways to

control Federal spending is to control waste, fraud, and abuse. Perhaps you've seen those headlines and the TV news about the Pentagon paying \$100 for a 4-cent diode or \$900 for a plastic cap. Now, what is missing or buried in all of those stories is the most important fact of all: It was Cap Weinberger's people -- Defense Department auditors and inspectors -- who ordered the audits in the first place and who conducted the investigations that revealed those figures. Those are our figures. We're the ones who formed a special unit to prosecute Department of Defense fraud cases. And in just an 18-month period, the Department has obtained 650 convictions, and this doesn't count the number of settlements that have been made not going to court. So despite all the headlines, we are keeping that promise to weed out waste, fraud, and abuse.

In foreign policy, we've let the world know that America stands up for democratic ideals again. And one other thing: Under our administration, this nation is through with hand-wringing and apologizing. We don't have to put up walls to keep our people in. We don't use an army of secret police to keep them quiet. We don't imprison political and religious dissidents in mental hospitals. And we don't coldbloodedly shoot defenseless airliners out of the sky.

What we are doing is working tirelessly for a just peace in the Middle East, promoting human rights in southern Africa, giving firm support to the forces of democracy in Central America, and negotiating for balanced and verifiable arms reductions. In fact, in our search for peace we have more major arms control negotiations underway with the Soviets than any other administration in history. And this is the first time that the Soviets have agreed to go beyond nuclear arms ceilings to negotiate actual reductions in nuclear weapons.

They haven't done it as well as they should; we haven't got them to the point that we think they should be. But at least they're there talking. And I don't think they would be there talking if it wasn't for the buildup in the military strength of the United States, the sort of signal they've gotten.

We can hold our heads high. I believe with all my heart that the United States is safer, stronger, and more secure today -- both economically and militarily -- than before. And if enough of you would just make your voices heard, we can make two more powerful contributions to the cause of good; We can welcome God back into America's classrooms, and we can finally protect the life of the unborn child.

I believe one word sums up the difference between today and 1980: Hope. Hope in being reborn in America. A better future awaits us, and together, we can make America a nation of winners again. So let us have faith. Let us go forward, remaining true to our vision of progress -- the vision Strom Thurmond has worked so hard to achieve. It begins with your families, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. We don't ask the people to trust us; we say trust yourselves, trust your own values, and working together, we'll make America great again.

Too many of our opponents are only comfortable trusting government. Their solutions -- higher taxes and more spending -- could bring us back full circle to the source of our economic problems, with the Government deciding that it knows better than you what should be done with your life. Their road is timid and appeals to fear and envy. We have a great message. We can keep dreams alive in the hearts of our people. And one sure way to do that is to reelect

in 1984 our friend, Strom Thurmond, Senator of South Carolina.

I want to thank all of you. I just have to say this afternoon I had a most thrilling afternoon out on the campus of South Carolina, at the University of South Carolina, and seeing thousands of those wonderful young people. And you looked out at them, and you know I did some of my life in public office back in the riotous days when if I went to a campus, I started a riot. And to see those thousands of young people out there was to see the future of America. To see these young people, also from that campus, and hear them up here tonight is to see the future of America. And I assure you, the future is very bright indeed.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.

Note: The President spoke at 7:45 p.m. in the Cantey Building at the South Carolina State fairgrounds. Prior to the dinner, the President attended two Republican Party fundraising receptions at the fairgrounds. Following the dinner, the President returned to Washington, D.C.

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The Associated Press

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HEADLINE: Thurmond's Recipe for 90th Birthday: Diet, Exercise and Optimism

BYLINE: By GARY KARR, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: AIKEN, S.C.

KEYWORD: Thurmond at 90

BODY:

Sen. Strom Thurmond, who turns 90 on Saturday, rarely misses a chance to tell people his recipe for a vigorous life.

"The secret to long life is good diet, exercise and an optimistic attitude," Thurmond told an audience recently. It's a well-worn phrase for the South Carolina Republican.

Thurmond, who first was elected to the Senate in 1954 and is the oldest member of Congress, shows little signs of giving in to age.

He exercises for 50 minutes a day, either bicycling, lifting weights, doing calisthenics or swimming. He stopped jogging to go easier on his joints. He also avoids fried foods, caffeine and alcohol.

"As long as I'm in good health physically and mentally, I'm going to continue to serve. If that wasn't the case, I wouldn't stay five minutes," Thurmond said in a recent telephone interview from Washington.

He ticks off a long list of projects ahead of him: budget cutting, protecting the state's military bases and legalizing fetal tissue research.

Questions about his age and effectiveness surfaced last year when Thurmond, the Senate Judiciary Committee's ranking Republican, faded into the background during the televised confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Other Republicans took the lead in questioning Anita Hill, who accused Thomas of sexual harassment.

When The State, a Columbia newspaper, quoted some people questioning Thurmond's performance, it received a flood of letters praising him.

For his part, Thurmond dismisses the questions. "I didn't try to hog the whole show," he said.

Some Republicans say privately that Thurmond should step aside in 1996 for Republican Gov. Carroll Campbell. But when rumors swirled that the governor had contemplated challenging Thurmond, Campbell quickly denied it.

In his latest campaign, Thurmond's television commercials showed him bounding up the steps of the U.S. Capitol and doing push-ups in his office.

A large part of his image of eternal youth is his family. His second wife, Nancy, a former beauty queen, married the senator when he was 66 and she was 22. They had four children. The couple separated last year.

The Judiciary Committee's chairman, Democratic Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, tells of a meeting with then-Attorney General Dick Thornburgh a few years ago at which Thornburgh was discussing the department's objections to part of a crime bill.

"No one thinks Strom is listening and then he comes in and says, 'Mr. Attorney General, if I'm not mistaken, you had the exact same language in your bill a few years ago,'" Biden said.

Thurmond's father was a campaign manager for "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, a governor of post-Reconstruction South Carolina. Thurmond became a school superintendent in 1929, then, as a Democrat, was governor from 1947-51.

He was part of a group of southern Democrats who split from the party to form the Dixiecrat, or States Rights, party. In 1948, he won 39 electoral votes as the Dixiecrat presidential nominee.

Although he led Southern politicians opposed to federal civil rights laws, Thurmond was known as a relatively liberal southern Democrat. As governor, he recommended repealing the poll tax that kept many poor blacks from voting.

To this day, Thurmond says the issue wasn't race, but "federal power versus state power" - although the state power he wanted preserved was the power to segregate.

In 1950, Thurmond lost a bid for the Senate. He tried again four years later - this time as a write-in candidate - and won.

Thurmond switched to the GOP in 1964 after becoming disenchanted with the liberal tilt of the Democratic Party.

Thurmond has moved away from his segregationist stance of the 1950s. He lobbied President Nixon to appoint a black to the federal bench, hired black staff members and supported legislation making Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a national holiday.

For his epitaph, he suggested: "He loved the people, and the people loved him."

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August 4, 1992, Tuesday, Final Edition

NAME: STROM THURMOND; ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE E1

LENGTH: 3886 words

HEADLINE: Thurmond & the Girl From Edgeville;
Old Stories Have Reemerged About the Senator And His Longtime Ties With a Black Woman

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Marilyn W. Thompson, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

In the fall of 1947, the official car of the governor of South Carolina pulled into the narrow driveway of South Carolina State College, a small, all-black school nestled in a dirt-poor farming hamlet. Driven by a state trooper, the long sedan rolled to a halt directly in front of the president's office.

The car's dramatic entrance set off laughter among students gathered on a grassy rise overlooking the administration building. The visit was part of the private life of then-Gov. Strom Thurmond -- an arch-segregationist who, the next year, would launch a campaign as the Dixiecrat candidate for president of the United States.

During the visit to Orangeburg, some remember seeing Thurmond talk with a young woman -- a quiet, studious business major from Pennsylvania who kept such a low profile on campus that her picture was regularly omitted from the student yearbook. The woman, Essie Mae Washington, was believed by many on the campus and throughout the state's black community to be Thurmond's daughter, the offspring of a relationship he allegedly had as a young man with a black woman in his home town of Edgefield, S.C.

The story has long been a whispered part of Southern political folklore. Over the years various journalists, including this one, have tried to piece together the parts. I have interviewed dozens of people, some as long ago as 10 years when I worked as a South Carolina reporter, some as recently as last week. Those interviews, and documents from Thurmond's gubernatorial papers, show clear ties. But both Thurmond and the supposed daughter have denied that he is her father, and no one has provided evidence that he is.

Recently the issue has taken on a new life with yet another round of published assertions and denials. What is undeniable -- and an ironic footnote to the tortured history of U.S. race relations -- is that at the height of his campaign to separate the races, this most staunch segregationist had a cordial bond with a young black woman. This intersection of Thurmond's life with that of a black woman born in poverty is a story that has accompanied his long political life, a career that spanned seven decades and in many ways defined the

changing course of Southern politics in modern times.

"As long as she was enrolled in State, we'd see the limo come down from time to time. The story was that he helped her out whenever she had troubles down at the college. She never talked about it. Everybody just assumed she was his daughter," said Frank Cain, a lawyer in Bennettsville, S.C., who knew the woman while they both were students at the school.

"Nobody needed to talk about it," said Robert Bellinger, a cousin of the man Essie Mae married while enrolled at the school. "I used to tease my cousin that he had married the governor's daughter. He'd just laugh and say, 'Well, I wish I could get some of that money.' "

The money was apparently financial aid from the governor. That Halloween of 1947, Washington typed a simple letter to Thurmond that was logged into the official files of the governor's office.

"Dear Sir," it read.

"This is to acknowledge receipt of your loan received on Saturday, October 25.

"Thank you very much."

In carefully rounded penmanship, it was signed "E.M. Washington."

Washington, 66, said she has received money from Thurmond, but in several interviews she has denied that he is her father, calling him "a close friend of my family -- a wonderful man who's helped a lot of people." She said he provided her some financial help, "but not a lot."

There is nothing in Thurmond's official papers from that time to suggest that the governor provided financial aid to other indigent blacks during that era.

"He visited me one time [at South Carolina State], one time, that's all," said Washington, who later changed her last name when she married, in a telephone interview from her Los Angeles home last week. "He was on campus on other business, and knowing me and knowing my family, he asked to see me. That's all there was to it." Washington declined to discuss her parentage.

Thurmond has said he does not recall "an inordinate number of visits to the school," according to spokeswoman Susan Pelter. While governor, he was an ex officio member of its board.

For Washington, the rumor has followed her throughout her life, trailing her through four states, her long career as a public school teacher, her marriage to a Georgia lawyer and the births of four children.

The story also has recurred throughout Thurmond's career as a potential Achilles' heel. At the time Thurmond provided her financial aid, he was positioning himself as the symbol of stubborn white supremacy in the last years before the dawn of civil rights.

His political enemies repeatedly looked for ways to use information about Washington to ruin him, at one point surreptitiously photographing her on the State College campus.

Black Democratic Party leaders used rumors about Washington to generate an enduring hatred within their ranks for the shrewd politician who once urged that blacks be banned from the ballot box and public swimming pools, then embraced them as their strength and numbers made them a force no politician could ignore.

Robert Sherrill, who first printed the story in his 1968 book, "Gothic Politics in the Deep South," said yesterday it was "one of the most frequently repeated rumors I've ever encountered."

About to turn 90, his views on race recast into more moderate language years ago, the oldest U.S. senator last week saw that story resurrected once again in, of all places, Penthouse magazine, in an account immediately picked up by the South Carolina press.

Thurmond's response was confused. Confronted by Penthouse gossip columnists recently with anecdotal evidence of his relationship to Washington, Pelter, his spokeswoman, first brought back word that her boss did not even recall the woman's name. A few days later, she changed the story, telling Penthouse that Thurmond did remember Essie Mae Washington, and yes, he did recall giving her financial aid while she was a college student, as he did with many other needy young people.

Later, Pelter said the confusion was due to miscommunication. "The reporter gave me a name and I asked the senator the name and he did not recall it. Then the reporter called back and gave me another name -- a maiden name or a married name -- and he did remember that one. That was the source of the discrepancy," she said.

Thurmond refused interviews, and Pelter called the Penthouse column "untrue and unworthy of publication," the same response Thurmond has used in years past when the rumor surfaced in print. Washington, too, said the Penthouse story is "full of lies" and that she is now being hounded by reporters.

But in the senator's home state, where Penthouse is widely considered too sinful to buy at the newsstands, the recent flap has resurrected hope among Thurmond's detractors that finally an unwritten chapter of his life will be told.

"It's a belated exposure," said Thurmond's archrival W.W. Mims, the elderly publisher of the 156-year-old Edgefield Advertiser, the weekly newspaper in the senator's home town, which first printed the allegation in 1972.

"This conspiracy by the mass media has protected Thurmond all these years, but it is my strong opinion that we, as journalists, have a duty to expose this. It's a shame that now, as an old man, he'll have to suffer the consequences. It's a story that should have been told long ago," he said.

Born to Politics Set amid the scrubby pine forests and cotton fields of southern South Carolina, Edgefield is a village frozen in the late 19th century, a place where the exploits of the Confederate heroes carved into stone on the

town square often come up in casual conversation, as if they were still alive. In a segregated section of town known as Old Buncombe is a street named for Preston "Bully" Brooks, the cane-wielding U.S. senator whose merciless beating of one of his colleagues on the Senate floor was a precursor of the Civil War. On the unpaved part of Brooks Street, where the tended lawns of prosperous white families merged into a depressing shantytown for the city's blacks, a young woman named Essie was one of a large family who lived in bleak poverty in the 1920s. In a town where segregation was strictly enforced, where the Ku Klux Klan was so accepted that it occasionally publicized its rallies in the local newspaper, she struggled to make a living in a white man's world.

Some remember her working as a teacher in the one-room schoolhouses assigned to black children (the state at that time allocated \$ 5 a year for a black child's education). Another of her jobs, her neighbors and daughter later recalled, was working as a maid in one of the finest residences in Edgefield, the Thurmond family home.

Strom Thurmond at the time was a rural schoolteacher destined for bigger things. Born in 1902, he was one of six children of prominent Edgefield attorney William Thurmond. Strom had been raised on politics as his father carried out local duties for U.S. Sen. "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, a legendary race-baiter and the kingpin of state politics.

Although Thurmond's father had once hoped to run for public office, his political aspirations were quashed after he shot a man in cold blood on the town square during a political feud. Strom, who later said he began shaking hands at political meetings when he was 6, was left to wear the mantle.

His ambition from an early age was to extend an Edgefield tradition and win the governorship (the town had produced more governors than any other city). Even as a teacher, he began thinking of ways to cultivate loyalties among his students that would someday translate into votes.

He wrote long letters to the editors of weekly newspapers, offering his services as a free tutor to help fight illiteracy. But he made it clear the offer was for whites only. "I shall be glad to teach white adults ... the fundamental principles, even the alphabet itself, and will do this any time, night or day ... without remuneration," he wrote in 1924.

The Thurmonds led a prosperous life, always employing a crew of black household servants and laborers for their farm. "Daddy was always so good to the blacks who worked on the farm. He was always ready to help them. When they needed food, they would come over and tell him that they needed so much [money] and he would just say, 'Go on up to Reel's store and get what you need,' " recalled Thurmond's sister, Mary, in an interview several years ago. "We had a big family. We really needed help. In those days, just about everybody had a cook and a maid and a farm boy."

Young and robust, a health enthusiast who liked to run marathons long before it was the fashion, Thurmond was one of the town's most eligible bachelors. He coached a girls' basketball team and flirted constantly with the players, former students recalled. He was active in the Southern Baptist Church, where women swooned over the poised graduate of Clemson College, then a military school.

In Old Buncombe, Essie's neighbors began to talk about young Thurmond when she became pregnant around 1925, telling friends that Thurmond was the father of her child, according to taped interviews conducted many years later by Mims, the local newspaper editor. Modjeska Simkins, a now-deceased civil rights leader with roots in Edgefield and Orangeburg, told me that Essie was destitute when she gave birth to a light-skinned baby girl, Essie Mae, who was believed by many in the black community to be Thurmond's daughter, but that Thurmond never acknowledged the child. It was a source of considerable ill will among Edgefield blacks, she recalled.

Mims discovered a number of witnesses to the child's birth and early years when he set out in the early 1970s to prove that Thurmond was the father, an issue he pursued relentlessly for years. Though Essie is long since deceased, he taped interviews with her neighbors and later shared the transcripts with me, including one account by a black woman, Frances Dunton, whose mother helped feed and clothe the child. Thurmond, she said, did nothing for the girl in her early years.

Birth records in South Carolina are confidential, and a check of California public records provides only her birth date.

At a very young age, the child, named Essie Mae after her mother, went away to live with a maternal aunt in Coatesville, Pa., a small town in southern Pennsylvania that had become a Northern refuge for oppressed Edgefield blacks. She moved into a house in the shadow of the Lukens Steel Mill on a street populated by many friends of her family.

One elderly Pennsylvania neighbor now in her eighties, who asked last week that her name not be printed for fear she would be found "hanging from a tree," said the young Essie Mae arrived with nothing. But the woman, a close friend of the aunt's, said the aunt told her that Thurmond gave support to the girl. "He did help her out. I guess he's helped her out since the time she was a young girl. When she was born, she didn't have nothing -- that's why her aunt took her," the woman said.

As the girl grew up through the 1930s and '40s, Thurmond's political star rose rapidly back in South Carolina. Elected in an upset to the post of superintendent of the 4,000-student Edgefield County school system, he vowed to improve the low-ranked system, particularly schooling for the 30 percent of the black population who could neither read nor write. He hired black teachers to work overtime for \$1 a night and give lessons in hygiene and "good principles of living." He touted the successful campaign several years later when he ran a winning race for state Senate.

Liberal Turned Dixiecrat When Thurmond assumed the governor's office in 1947 after a bitter, racially charged campaign, the national press billed him as the great liberal hope of the Southern Democratic Party. He was taking unusually progressive positions for a South Carolina politician, such as demanding prosecution of a group of white cabdrivers accused of the roadside lynching of a black man. He also made for lively copy. He married a young secretary in his office, a newly graduated college beauty queen named Jean Crouch, and when Life magazine showed up to profile him, he stood on his head in a pair of skimpy gym shorts to demonstrate his fitness -- a picture that scandalized some of his Southern Baptist constituents.

The Washington Post, August 4, 1992

FOCUS

But blacks, who had begun to hope that perhaps Thurmond could make a difference, were stunned when he did a quick about-face and became the leader of a brewing Southern revolt over the proposed civil rights reforms of President Truman. Enshrining some of the code words of the segregation movement, he blasted Truman for attacking "the traditions, customs and institutions in which we live." Truman, he said, wanted to break down laws that "have proven to be essential to the racial integrity and purity of the white and Negro races alike."

Not long after, he led a bolt from the Democratic Party and emerged as the States' Rights -- or "Dixiecrat" -- candidate for president in 1948. In a keynote address, he urged Southerners to fight "as long as we breathe ... to preserve our civilization in the South. All the laws of Washington and all the bayonets of the Army cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches and places of recreation," he thundered in some of the most virulent rhetoric in the nation's history.

Back at home, blacks who were familiar with the Essie Mae rumor could not believe Thurmond's gall. Simkins remembered hearing the speech and declaring to her mother: "I'm going to fight Thurmond from the mountain to the sea. He will not get away with saying these things about my people."

'The Connection With Us' Essie Mae Washington returned to Edgefield occasionally for visits with her remaining family. Mims later quoted blacks who said they remembered Thurmond's sisters visiting the house one summer to deliver money to the girl. But Thurmond's sister, Mary, told me such a visit never took place.

After graduating from a Coatesville high school, where she excelled in public speaking and led the Bible club, Washington enrolled in 1946 at South Carolina State, a meagerly funded institution closely linked to the state's building racial tensions.

The next year, the year students remember he came to visit her, Thurmond set up a "separate but equal" law school at the college to accommodate a black student who had been denied admission at white schools. As Thurmond explained in a letter to a constituent, white leaders felt that was "the only way we can retain segregation and prevent the entrance of Negroes to the law school at the University [of South Carolina]."

Although Washington kept to herself, her movements about the Orangeburg campus attracted great interest. One of the most repeated stories among students involved Washington asking school officials to call Thurmond when she was disciplined for violating curfew. She later denied this.

John McCray, a now-deceased civil rights leader who helped lead the fight for the black law school, told me that the college's president, M.F. Whittaker, said Washington was Thurmond's daughter and that Whittaker had to arrange meetings with her during the governor's campus visits. McCray said NAACP leaders and Thurmond's white enemies in the Democratic Party arranged for the woman to be secretly photographed in their effort to obtain material they could use against Thurmond politically.

used. An investigator for a state agency had secured the Essie Mae Washington photos and they made their way to Johnston aides, who kept them on file. Advisers to Johnston's campaigns said in interviews that the photos were never made public, largely because of a "gentlemen's agreement" in old-school Southern politics that candidates should not indulge in smear tactics.

Thurmond lost the election, but made a stunning comeback when he won as a write-in candidate in 1954. He came to Washington and established himself as a civil rights obstructionist, fighting the renewal of the Civil Rights Commission, trying to link black judicial nominee Thurgood Marshall to the Communist Party and waging the longest filibuster in Senate history in opposition to a civil rights package. Blacks, he frequently argued, were being used as dupes by the Communists to destroy the American way of life.

Spurned by the Democratic Party leadership, Thurmond in 1968 switched to the GOP. By 1972, his war against civil rights lost, Thurmond began reconstructing his racial views, arguing that his Dixiecrat campaign had not been anti-black but simply an ardent defense of Jeffersonian states' rights. His top aide, Harry Dent, told reporters the image change was designed to "get him in a position where he can't be attacked as being a racist." Thurmond appointed blacks to his Senate staff, nominated blacks for judgeships and public offices, and slowly cultivated a network of black support in his state. Old wounds healed and he became something of a harmless curiosity. The most recent public glimpse of Thurmond was as the frail, at times rambling and unintelligible, defender of Clarence Thomas, the controversial black nominee to the Supreme Court.

He continues to see Essie Mae Washington occasionally when she drops by his Senate office on trips to Washington, his press spokeswoman Pelter said. She is like a number of people who "are grateful for his assistance ... and do stay in touch with him."

Washington, widowed in 1964, had been living the quiet life of a schoolteacher until her peace was interrupted weeks ago by reporters seeking a new line on an old story.

"That's just not true," she said again and again. "They're making up lies about me. I wish they would leave me alone."

To South Carolina lawyer Frank Cain and other blacks who know Essie Mae Washington, the relationship -- whatever it is -- becomes a profound epilogue on a dismal period of Southern history. The contrast between Thurmond's private paternalism and public intolerance, they contend, is just the sort of thing that kept blacks in political bondage for so long. "Senator Thurmond is like many other Southern politicians," says Cain. "He's a man descended from slave owners -- that's how he came to know black people."

Metro resource director Bridget Roeber contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, SEN. STROM THURMOND, THE RECONSTRUCTED SOUTH CAROLINA SEGREGATIONIST WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH A BLACK WOMAN, PERSISTENT RUMORS SAY SHE IS HIS DAUGHTER, MAY BE AT ODDS WITH HIS PUBLIC IMAGE. TWP; PHOTO, AP

TYPE: BIOGRAPHY

The Washington Post, August 4, 1992

PAGE 43

FOCUS

SUBJECT: RACIAL DISCRIMINATION; PARENTS; SEXUAL RELATIONS; BLACKS; POLITICAL
ISSUES AND PHILOSOPHY; MEMBERS OF CONGRESS; SOUTH CAROLINA

NAMED-PERSONS: STROM THURMOND; ESSIE MAE WASHINGTON

ENHANCEMENT: AGE

10TH STORY of Focus printed in FULL format.

The Associated Press

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February 13, 1990, Tuesday, PM cycle

SECTION: Political News

LENGTH: 499 words

HEADLINE: Oldest Member of Congress to Seek a Seventh Term

BYLINE: By BRUCE SMITH, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: AIKEN, S.C.

KEYWORD: Candidacy Announcements

BODY:

Sen. Strom Thurmond, who at 87 says the secret to long life is good diet, exercise and optimism, has announced he'll run for re-election in November. He has no formal challengers.

Thurmond became the oldest member of Congress when Rep. Claude Pepper, D-Fla., died last year at age 88. If Thurmond wins, he would be 94 when his new term - his seventh - ends.

His announcement Monday came a day before planned announcements by candidates elsewhere.

In Indiana, Republican Sen. Dan Coats announced his candidacy today for the Senate seat he was appointed to fill after Dan Quayle was elected vice president. Coats faces Baron Hill, a Democratic state representative.

"Our first challenge is to sustain and expand the remarkable economic growth of the last six years," Coats said. "That means making 'made in the USA' what the world wants to buy, no new taxes, and finally mustering the will to balance the budget."

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., also was expected to announce his re-election bid today. He has no announced opposition.

In Maine, Sen. William S. Cohen, was embarking on a bid for a third term. He will be challenged by state Rep. Neil Rolde, a Democrat from York.

In Minneapolis, Democrat Ted Mondale, son of former Vice President Walter Mondale, today planned to announce his first bid for elected office as a state Senator a western suburban area of Minneapolis. His opponent would be Republican Phyllis McQuaid, who holds the seat.

In Ohio on Monday, auto dealer Steve Tatone said he would seek the Democratic nomination for the state's 7th Congressional District. Tatone will face another Democratic, a retired Air Force officer, Jack Schira, and state Sen. David

Hobson, a Republican. Michael DeWine, the GOP incumbent, is running for lieutenant governor.

In his western South Carolina hometown, Thurmond told a small gathering he was proud to be a South Carolinian, working to make it the greatest state in the Union.

"I wouldn't elect a man just because of his seniority, but if he has all the other qualifications then it should be counted, and it is very helpful," said Thurmond, a Republican who has served in the Senate since 1955.

"In all my years of public service I have never felt a stronger obligation to continue my work for the future of our state and our nation," he told a small group of supporters.

Thurmond has campaign funds of about \$700,000 for the campaign, according to the Federal Elections Commission, and no formal opposition.

Still, he did not seem overly confident he would be victorious in November.

"I've had opponents every time," said Thurmond, who wore a red-white-and-blue tie and an American flag pin in his lapel. "The office belongs to the people. I'm a temporary occupant of the office."

A former governor, state senator and judge who ran unsuccessfully for president as a Dixiecrat in 1948, Thurmond switched from the Democratic to the GOP in 1964. He served as president pro tempore of the Senate from 1981 through 1987.

18TH STORY of Focus printed in FULL format.

Proprietary to the United Press International 1982

March 28, 1982, Sunday, AM cycle

SECTION: Washington News

LENGTH: 732 words

HEADLINE: Thurmond rights vote marks milestone

BYLINE: By ED ROGERS

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

KEYWORD:

Voting

BODY:

For the first time in his life, veteran Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., has cast his vote for voting rights -- a milestone that passed almost unnoticed.

The Senate Judiciary Committee chairman last week joined in a 3-2 subcommittee vote backing an extension of special voting rights enforcement. Thurmond's vote is being viewed as a symbol of how far conservatives are reaching out to satisfy civil rights advocates.

Thurmond, 79, as Democratic governor of South Carolina in 1948, ran for president in 1948 as the 'Dixiecrat' candidate after the Democrats adopted a strong civil rights plank.

Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enfranchised thousands of black voters in his home state, Thurmond, who became a Republican in 1964 out of enthusiasm for Barry Goldwater, has courted the black vote in his re-election campaigns.

Thurmond voted last Wednesday in the Judiciary subcommittee for a straight, 10-year extension of the voting act's current enforcement procedures -- with no 'bail out' provision -- covering all or part of 22 states.

He had voted against the 1965 Voting Rights Act and against two previous enforcement extensions, both in committee and on the Senate floor.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, chairman of the subcommittee on the Constitution, uses the example Thurmond to make a point about the conservative position on civil rights.

'What we are trying to do is show that three of us are totally for the Voting Rights Act,' Hatch told United Press International, referring to himself, Thurmond and Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa.

'Even Thurmond agreed to this resolution of the problem,' Hatch said. 'It is a tremendous concession at this point.'

What Hatch is up against is 65 senators who have formally endorsed a far tougher House-passed bill that includes a clause Hatch believes could place local elective office across the country on a racial quota basis.

Proprietary to the United Press International, March 28, 1982

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The Republican counterproposal was introduced by Grassley and supported by Thurmond and Hatch. Opposed were Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz., and Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who voted by proxy.

Thurmond called Grassley's bill a 'tough proposal.' It would extend special enforcement, aimed largely at the South, for 10 years compared to previous extensions of five years and seven years.

This enforcement requires jurisdictions that used literacy tests and had low voter turnouts before 1965 to obtain federal 'pre-clearance' of any voting changes -- including even the locations of polling places.

Finally, the measure does not include any provision for the nine fully covered states and parts of 13 other states to bail out at any time before the 10 years is up, no matter how perfectly they comply with the act.

Thurmond, Hatch and Grassley laid aside their own and President Reagan's goal of having a 'fair' bail out provision. They wanted the bill to be precisely what civil rights leaders asked for last spring.

'Last year at this time,' Hatch said, 'virtually every civil rights leader in America testified before the House committee in favor of exactly what the Grassley-Thurmond amendment did. Now we give them exactly what they wanted.'

The civil rights leaders argued in the House hearings for a straight, 10-year extension of the pre-clearance provision.

But the House extension bill ended up as a permanent extension, with a bail out provision that Republicans claim is too strict, and with another change that had nothing to do with pre-clearance and got little attention.

That change involves a section of the law that says anyone can file suit charging an existing government system is illegally discriminatory. The new language says this can be proved by 'effects.'

The change was intended to override a Supreme Court ruling in a Mobile, Ala., case that there must be proof of intent.

Hatch said the effects test could be used to void city annexations, overturn redistricting and require racially proportionate election results -- wherever minority candidates do not win in proportion to their population ratios.

Hatch believes many of the House bill's 65 co-sponsors in the Senate signed up without knowing about the effects test.

'I am finding more and more senators who are becoming concerned about this so-called results test,' Hatch said. 'They are starting to realize that this test, once institutionalized, could turn this country upside down.'

GRAPHIC: PICTURE

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November 2, 1988, Wednesday, Final Edition

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE C1

LENGTH: 3674 words

HEADLINE: 'Uncle Strom': The Pragmatist's Legacy;
S.C.'s Thurmond, From Dixiecrat Fire-Eater to Patriarch of the GOP's Southern Strategy

BYLINE: Jim Naughton, Washington Post Staff Writer

DATELINE: MARION, S.C.

BODY:

The senator stands behind a podium perched atop a stage in a cavernous gymnasium jammed with black voters. He has just mispronounced the name of the guest of honor. Quiet, derisive laughter sweeps through the room.

"Opera Winfrey?" people whisper to each other. "Opera Winfrey!"

Had the leaders of the civil rights movement tried to imagine the private hell that God devised for Strom Thurmond, they might have envisioned a scene like this one. Only the room would have no exit and the laughter would never end.

Forty years ago, as a maverick presidential candidate, Thurmond stood before audiences whiter than this one is black, and promised that segregation would last forever, that "all the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army, cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches and our places of recreation."

The senator has eaten platefuls of Jim Crow since the Dixiecrats died. He has appointed black staff members and established scholarships at black colleges. The rushing waters of history have worn him down -- that much is obvious. What is less well understood is how the 85-year-old Thurmond, in his rocklike opposition, has changed the course and composition of the stream.

The nature of his achievement is evident in the polls that detail George Bush's lead in the Electoral College and on maps that show that the once solidly Democratic South has, for a generation, been solidly Republican.

"He played the key and strategic role in pioneering and paving the way for that change," says Harry Dent, the Thurmond adviser who became deputy counsel to Richard Nixon. "Presidential politics have been changed by Strom Thurmond and what he did more than by anybody in this country in these recent years."

In the process Thurmond has transformed his own image from radical to pragmatist, from The Whitest Man in America to Uncle Strom, Our Friend in Washington. It is in the latter role that he takes the stage at the jam-packed James S. Williams Memorial Scholarship Fundraiser.

The event, sponsored by a prominent black Republican family, is rich in symbolism, an image-maker's dream. But the scene in this gymnasium notwithstanding, the central theme of Thurmond's career is not change, it is constancy, an enduring allegiance to states' rights, militarism and strict law enforcement.

Even his tactical retreat on segregation has brought a strategic victory. By surrendering their most objectionable goal, Southern conservatives, like Thurmond, broadened their appeal without alienating their original supporters. They also made it exceedingly difficult to campaign for the black vote and still win a national election.

Thurmond speaks almost dismissively today about the era when his whiteness was the essence of his public persona.

"You see down south all the states had laws providing for separation of the races and all the governors held up their hands to support the laws and there was no trouble about it," he says. "Everybody followed that practice until the Supreme Court struck it down in Brown v. Board of Education. But since then, the South has had less trouble than any part of the country ... We've had no trouble down south."

There are those who see it differently; and remember it differently, too, wondering how much of the past can be erased by the well-aimed gestures and easily worked acts of charity.

"The climate he created in this state was one in which people were killed, people were injured, and people were injured financially," says William Gibson, a South Carolinian who is chairman of the national board of the NAACP.

Or, in the words of Modjeska Simkins, the 88-year-old matriarch of the state's civil rights movement: "The blood is on the ground."

Strom's World

The past is never over. It isn't even past.

William Faulkner, "Intruder in the Dust"

Racial prejudice and political belligerence are entwined like a single sinuous root burrowed deep in the soil of Edgefield County, Thurmond's birthplace. Preston Brooks, the cane-swinging congressman who nearly beat an abolitionist senator to death, hailed from Edgefield. So did Chancellor Wardlaw, who wrote South Carolina's ordinance of secession.

"My grandfather was in the Civil War, George Washington Thurmond," the senator says. "He was with Lee at Appomattox when he surrendered to Grant. He was in the Civil War, the Mexican War and the Indian Wars. Wherever there was fighting he was there. Heh heh."

Thurmond's father, Judge J. William Thurmond, was a political ally and personal friend of perhaps the most radical of the state's racist populists, the legendary "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman. Strom Thurmond still remembers his first trip to Tillman's farm in 1912 when he was 9.

"My father told me to go up there and shake hands with him," he says. "When we got there I went up and put out my hand. He was a very profane old fella. He said, 'What in the hell do you want?' Enough to scare a young boy to death.

"I said, 'I want to shake hands with you.' And he took my hand and he said, 'What do you want to do? Shake hands? Well why in the hell don't you shake then?'

"I started shaking and I've been shaking hands ever since."

Thurmond's voice -- nasal, high-pitched -- sounds very much as it does on tapes made four decades ago at the Dixiecrat convention; his laugh, a soft heh heh, has about it a hint of feigned surprise. The senator walks with an impressive vigor although his upper body seems to be slowly curling around a large oval object. His suits are tasteful, his manner courtly. The senator still flirts with young women and is vain enough to have had two almost-successful hair transplants.

The walls of his Washington office are barely visible behind an array of plaques, photos and honorary degrees. He has his national wall, his state wall and his education wall. There is a special place reserved for photos of the senator with the seven presidents whose terms have coincided with his own. On that wall hangs a picture of his father.

"I haven't patterned my life after anybody, except maybe my father," the senator says. "He was always helping people and that's my motto more or less. Helping people."

Thurmond is an odd amalgam of American political types: the angry populist as benevolent patrician, an outsider fighting to make America safe for oligarchy. He interprets the Constitution as literally as fundamentalist Christians interpret the Bible. But his paradise does not loom in the millennial distance, it recedes in the not-so-distant past. It is an inheritance squandered sometime between the Allied victory in World War II and the 1948 Democratic convention.

Thurmond returned from that war a much-decorated hero and entered the gubernatorial race. His subsequent victory pitched him into another battle, the one fought to keep power in the hands of belligerent, benevolent men like the ones who shaped his boyhood.

Day of the Dixiecrats

If the Dixiecrats at the time seemed nothing more than a short-lived protest party, they appear in retrospect to be the forerunners of the Southern conservative movement that would transform American presidential politics.

"In that race I was just trying to protect the rights of the states and the rights of the people," the former presidential candidate says now. "Some in the news media tried to make it a race fight, but it was not that. It was federal power versus state power."

That interpretation, even 40 years later, is met with astonishment in some quarters, anger in others.

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"Thurmond has the capacity to interpret events and his own involvement in those events in a way that confounds others who may read his speeches or see him in a very different context," says James Banks, a professor of history at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, who is writing a biography of the senator.

"States' rights wasn't the issue," says civil rights activist Joseph Rauh. "Segregation was the issue and everybody knew it."

The plank that drove the Southern Democrats from the party seems osteopathically mild today. It endorsed a black person's right to vote, his right to work and his right not to be lynched or beaten. It advocated desegregating the Army.

"The civil rights program is the most un-American law ever proposed," Thurmond said that fall. "It was borrowed from the Communist, who know well that they can never gain control of America as long as our fundamental rights are preserved to the States."

Throughout the campaign he tried, with mixed results, to keep his rhetoric cooler than his openly racist supporters. One day he would declare that he was "not interested one whit in the question of white supremacy." On another he would raise the specter of Southern whites being forced to entertain blacks in their "living rooms" and "swimming pools."

This appeal won him four Southern states and 39 electoral votes -- a showing considerably better than those of, say, George McGovern in 1972 or Walter Mondale in 1984.

That achievement was not much remarked on in the wake of Truman's upset victory and the Dixiecrats' return to the party. But, looking back, the senator sees the race as the first step in the South's liberation from the social engineering of Democratic liberals.

"After the Civil War, the War Between the States, the South was under military occupation from 1866 to 1876," he says. "And all the people were Democrats because it was the Republicans who were in power when the federal government treated the South that way."

"Then when I ran, they voted for me. And the sky didn't fall because they didn't vote for the Democratic Party. So people began to see that they could vote in the way their conscience directed. That was really the race that emancipated people from the Democratic Party."

Breaking Away

Actually 1948 was only a dress rehearsal for 1964, the year the Republicans took their first steps toward becoming a national conservative party and Strom Thurmond decided to join them.

On Sept. 16, he went on statewide television in South Carolina to announce an impending apocalypse: "If the American people permit the Democratic Party to return to power, freedom in this country as we know it is doomed."

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To forestall this disaster, he planned to support Barry Goldwater in the upcoming election and work to build the Republican Party in the South.

"I didn't put any pressure on people to join me," Thurmond says. "I just told them where the two parties stood and I said the thinking of our people in the South is more in line with the Republican Party and you might as well face it."

Goldwater got trounced, adding only his home state of Arizona to the four Thurmond captured in 1948. But a movement had been born and Thurmond was among its most effective Southern spokesmen.

One reason was his willingness to do favors for the people of his state. "He's not afraid to flex his muscles on constituent services," says Mark Goodin, deputy press secretary for the Bush campaign and Thurmond's former press secretary. "Stuff that would have made other people blush, he would just wade into."

None of the senator's benevolence was evident to supporters of the civil rights movement on whom he kept up a venomous attack. In 1954 he helped draft the Southern Manifesto, which pledged to resist the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling "by all legal means." Three years later he staged the longest single-person filibuster in Senate history (24 hours and 18 minutes) to oppose a fair housing bill.

Looking back on Thurmond's career in this period it is hard to know which of his outbursts to take seriously. At one point he threatened a congressional investigation of Washington bookstores because they weren't stocking a right-wing novel that he liked. On another occasion he chastised the Army for lending outdated equipment to the producers of a film that "glorified Communist guerrillas." The movie was "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

Thurmond opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. At the zenith of the Great Society, one colleague called him "a leaky faucet in an empty house."

But there were millions of alienated voters who admired Thurmond and what he stood for. They were about to play a crucial role in the making of the president. In 1968 and all the years that followed.

The Southern Strategy

"There are four key main issues with the people of the South," Strom Thurmond says. "They're strong for national defense. They're strong for fiscal responsibility. They're strong for support of the family, and they're strong for law enforcement."

For much of his career he preached these virtues in the Senate with an anger that assured his rejection. But in 1968, the senator became a pragmatist. The Democrats had nominated Hubert Humphrey for president, the Republicans were being courted by Nelson Rockefeller. There was no lesser of these two evils.

Thurmond went to the Republican convention in Miami with a simple strategy: to help establish Richard Nixon as the perfect alternative to the undesirable Rockefeller and the unelectable Ronald Reagan. In one closed-door meeting

after another he lined up his fellow Southerners behind the former vice president.

"My philosophy was a little more in line with Reagan's than it was Nixon's," he says. "But I wasn't too sure that the people were ready to jump that far. I wasn't too sure that after Goldwater was defeated so decisively being a conservative that Reagan, another conservative, could quite make it. Whereas Nixon was a little more liberal but yet would be so much better. I felt we stood a better chance to elect Nixon."

Meanwhile, he and Harry Dent were outlining what became known as the Southern Strategy, a sophisticated appeal to Southern Democrats on school desegregation and other issues that separated them from their Northern counterparts.

The senator stumped throughout the region with his own organization, Thurmond Speaks for Nixon, pushing what have since come to be known as hot buttons. His task was made all the more difficult by the candidacy of Alabama Gov. George Wallace.

"We argued that a vote for George was a vote for Hubert," Dent says. And that logic carried the day: Nixon won 63 electoral votes in the deep and upper South to 45 for Wallace and just 25 for Humphrey.

"That was a model campaign," says Lee Atwater, a Thurmond prote'ge' who is now campaign manager for George Bush.

"I've used that as a blueprint for everything I've done in the South since then."

Keeping the Faith

Those who supposed that political success might somehow soften Strom Thurmond were disabused of that notion with the publication of his 1968 book "The Faith We Have Not Kept." It is a curious volume and what is even more curious is that Thurmond still hands it out.

In its pages the senator voices his admiration for South African and Rhodesian programs to educate "the natives," and attacks the appointment of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall as "clearly symbolic." He makes passing mention of the Dred Scott decision, claiming it was more legally sound than Brown v. Board of Education.

At one time, that sort of slightly veiled racial appeal was a sure bet to rally the faithful. But in the wake of the Voting Rights Act, even South Carolina was beginning to change. In the 1970 South Carolina gubernatorial race a moderate Democrat defeated a Thurmond-backed Republican who had run so egregiously racist a campaign that members of his own party felt obliged to say so.

The coalition of black and moderate white voters posed a potentially grave threat to Thurmond's 1972 reelection bid and he set out to dismantle it. In an interview that year, Harry Dent said it was time to "get [Thurmond] on the high ground of fairness on the race question," to make him less an ideologue and more "South Carolina's indispensable man in Washington."

It was the dawn of the age of Uncle Strom.

Since few Southern senators had displayed conspicuous bravery in the struggle for civil rights, getting Thurmond to the high ground of fairness proved surprisingly easy. In 1971 he became the first Southern senator to name a black person to his staff. In 1976 he became the first Southern senator to sponsor a black man for a federal judgeship. But it was not until the following year that the issue hit home: Thurmond walked his oldest daughter, Nancy Moore Thurmond, to her first day of school at A.C. Moore Elementary. Half her classmates and nearly half her teachers were black.

Thurmond was wooing blacks the way he had always wooed whites, using personal charm and political influence. He forged a particularly close bond with Armstrong Williams, the son of a prominent black farmer.

The two met 12 years ago at the Dry Dock Seafood House in Marion when Williams' father James, the man for whom the scholarship is named, introduced them after a speech.

"Senator," the 16-year-old said, "all my friends say you are a racist."

Thurmond told Williams that he shouldn't believe everything he heard, that he seemed like a bright young man and that he should send him a re'sume' when he graduated from high school. "Then you can judge for yourself," Thurmond said.

Four years later Williams was working in Thurmond's Washington office. In 1981, the president appointed him to a position in the Department of Agriculture.

Williams and Thurmond have remained friends. In 1983 they attended the Howard versus South Carolina State football game together as part of Thurmond's continuing efforts to attract black voters. Williams remembers Thurmond plunging into the crowd to do a little flesh pressing.

"People said to me, 'Armstrong, I did not want to shake his hand, but you gotta respect the man for coming out here,'" Williams recalls.

Blacks in South Carolina may respect Thurmond, but they don't vote for him. In 1978, the last time he faced serious opposition, Thurmond got just 8 percent of the black vote.

"As a practical matter," says Laughlin McDonald, an Edgefield native who tries civil rights cases for the ACLU, "the black voters in his own state have never forgiven him."

Past and Prologue

Washington is a difficult city in which to keep track of the past. It is not that memories are shorter here, but that politicians re-create themselves, sometimes retroactively, and with such regularity that it becomes too confusing to keep track.

The Whitest Man in America is now one of the Hill's great compromisers. The unpleasant matter of a segregationist past is now ascribed to his lifelong

devotion to his own peculiar interpretation of the Constitution. The obstructionist is being recast as a philosopher statesman.

"When you are in disagreement with so many things that Lyndon Johnson wanted to do, you naturally are attacking more," he says. "You are confronting more, don't you see? Now once you get in the chairman's position, or a position of power, then instead of confronting, you want to pull people in all you can."

His causes are not much different -- better bombs, tougher judges. But he's also written legislation to keep former White House officials from lobbying the government. He's authored a crime bill with Ted Kennedy, and a plastic gun ban with Howard Metzenbaum. He was among Joe Biden's first defenders in the wake of plagiarism charges. He's pushing for alcoholic beverages to be labeled a health hazard.

"Times change and people change, and people who can't change don't stay in office long," he says. "You got to meet changing conditions."

But Thurmond still knows where the hot buttons are. Digging into his briefcase, he withdraws a Bush brochure and begins to enumerate the faults of the Democratic presidential nominee. The performance has the feel of a litany, with Thurmond serving as both priest and people.

"Michael Dukakis supports gun control," Thurmond says. "Well, the South believes in owning guns."

"Michael Dukakis did not ban placing foster children with homosexual parents. Well, the Southern people wouldn't believe in putting children with homosexual foster parents."

"Opposes aid to the contras. Well, the Southern people are wholly in favor of supporting the contras."

"Michael Dukakis opposes capital punishment. The Southern people are in favor of capital punishment."

"Michael Dukakis is a card-carrying member of the ACLU. The Southern people are not strong for the ACLU."

But with the Bush campaign nearly over, Thurmond is looking ahead to his own reelection bid in 1990 when he will be 87. "It is my intention to run again if my health is as good as it is now," he says. "And I try to do the things necessary to keep good health, and very few people will."

He is also looking beyond that, to the judgment of time.

"I've always felt kindly toward black people," he says. "I worked down there with them in the cotton fields. I represented them as an attorney whether they could pay or not." He points to his education wall on which hang honorary degrees from every black college in the state, save one. Supporters say his votes in favor of extending the Voting Rights Act and establishing a federal holiday honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. represent his redemption on the race issue.

That doesn't impress his critics. "He had no conversion," says Joe Rauh. "What he's had is a political change. The man has never owned up to how bad he was."

But Strom Thurmond, who says he believes God's hand has guided his life, sees no evil in his own motivations. And all the plaques and photos and honorary degrees, all the thank-you notes and testimonials tell him he must be right.

One senses that Thurmond would like to be judged by the same standards he applies to his father's old friend, "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman.

"People today might not agree with some of the positions he took, but you have to consider the time when he lived," the senator says. "He must have done something to be so strong with the people."

He, like Tillman, is strong with the people. And he expects you to find that reassuring.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, STROM THURMOND IN HIS SENATE OFFICE. JAMES K.W. ATHERTON

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Public Papers of the Presidents

Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential
Citizens Medal and and Informal Exchange With Reporters

25 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 78

January 18, 1989

LENGTH: 444 words

The President. Well, we're here for a ceremony this morning that's going to begin with my reading the citations for the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Whether on the battlefield or Capitol Hill, Senator Robert Dole has served America heroically. Senate Majority Leader during one of the most productive Congresses of recent times, he has also been a friend to veterans, farmers, and Americans from every walk of life. Bob Dole has stood for integrity, straight talk, and achievement throughout his years of distinguished public service.

I'm very proud and pleased to present him with the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Bob Michel, a man who could always be counted on by his President, his constituents, and his country. Selfless and devoted to his work as House Minority Leader, Bob Michel steered through Congress some of the most revolutionary and wide-ranging legislation of the postwar era. His legislative skills and distinguished service played a critical role in restoring America's economic and military strength and opening a new era of world peace through freedom.

And I am very pleased and very happy to present the Presidential Citizens Medal. Congratulations.

His 65 years of public service to the country he loves speaks not only to Strom Thurmond's legislative achievement but his character, fortitude, and strength of mind and heart. A former judge, Presidential candidate, and President pro tempore of the United States Senate, he worked to appoint conservative judges and strong performance of constitutional law. The achievement of more than six decades have made the name of Strom Thurmond synonymous with distinguished public service and devotion to America.

Strom, I'm very pleased and proud to present to you the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

U.S. Trade With Libya

Reporter. Mr. President, do you plan to relax the restrictions on the five oil companies trading with Libya?

The President. Do I plan what?

Q. There has been some discussion that you may relax restrictions on five oil companies trading in Libya so that they can maintain their own assets and profits.

The President. I can only tell you it's under study right now as to that situation.

Presidential Pardons

Q. Do you have any plans to pardon anyone in the final days? Any plans to pardon anyone?

The President. Well, there are always pardons coming across my desk from the Justice Department.

Q. Patty Hearst?

The President. No, that hasn't come to my desk for attention.

Note: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

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The Associated Press

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September 10, 1991, Tuesday, AM cycle

SECTION: Washington Dateline

LENGTH: 566 words

HEADLINE: Senators Read His Words to Him and Ask What He Meant

BYLINE: By MIKE FEINSILBER, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

KEYWORD: Thomas-Scene

BODY:

Clarence Thomas began his confirmation hearing Tuesday with a little joke about his age and a lot of pointed reminders from his inquisitors that at 43 he is young enough to write Supreme Court decisions for the next 30 or 40 years.

Young enough, said Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., to sit through 10 presidential terms and thus to be, "more important than any president."

Young enough, said Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to write case law for the rest of this century and for an even longer period in the next century.

"Judge," said Biden to Thomas, "because of your youth - and God bless you for it - I never thought I'd be sitting here talking about the youth of a nominee to the Supreme Court, but I am. ... How old are you, judge?"

"Well," said Thomas, "I've aged over the last 10 weeks, but - 43."

That brought a laugh and those were the only words the nominee got to speak for some hours.

He sat alone at a table covered by green felt, with a microphone and a glass of water. Not five yards away sat the committee members, talking about him as though he were in another room, reading prepared statements about their role, his role and the importance of the occasion.

Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., reading his statement, implored Thomas not to give canned answers.

"You can only help your cause by being forthcoming," said Kohl. "Don't hedge, don't give us answers prepared for you by others and don't hide behind the argument that you can't prejudge issues."

The senators, one at a time, quoted Thomas' written words - he has submitted 36,000 pages to the committee - and asked him to explain what he meant by

them.

Thomas looked tense, staring intently ahead, chin in his hand. The room, columned, chandeliered, high-ceilinged room, scene of much past drama, was full of journalists and lawyers. The sense was that Thomas was sure of confirmation unless he muffed it here in this room.

Beside Thomas sat his wife, Virginia, and other family members, including his sister, Emma Mae Martin, whom Thomas has publicly berated - despite her years of work in a hospital cafeteria - as dependent on the welfare dole, living from check to check with trash in the yard and beer cans in the driveway.

Tourists waited in the corridors outside for a chance to observe. Betty Finn of Oceanside, Calif., said she slipped away from a United Methodist Church conference "to experience history" and to hear what Thomas had to say about affirmative action - necessary, she thought, "because we still have a society of racism."

Inside, Biden said Thomas brought "a philosophy different from what we have seen" from other nominees - a reference to his writings on the "natural law" doctrine that humankind is endowed with inalienable "natural" rights beyond those in the Constitution and beyond the reach of government.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, took note of another profound difference, Thomas' race.

He said Thomas had risen from the stinging experience of segregation as exemplified by a drinking fountain labeled "colored."

Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., who ran for president as the segregationist candidate of the Dixiecrat Party in 1948, the year Thomas was born, said Thomas' "personal struggle to overcome difficult circumstances early in his life is admirable. ... He is a man of immense courage" and fully qualified to a place on the court.