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ADDRESS
OF
THE HONORABLE
JAMES F. BYRNES
GOVERNOR

**To The General Assembly
of South Carolina**



COLUMBIA
JANUARY 24, 1951

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Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Senate:

Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

South Carolina is faced with serious educational problems—problems of increasing teachers' salaries, revising the school transportation system, and building new schools.

During the Primary campaign last summer and again in my inaugural address, I urged action upon these features of our public school system. Yesterday a Committee appointed by the House of Representatives presented you its report containing specific proposals to accomplish these objectives.

I am advised that in the preparation of the report, the House Committee has had the cooperation and advice of a group of Senators. They have done me the honor of consulting me on several occasions.

I believe the detailed proposals of this group present the best plan for an educational program.

I agree with the Committee that a retail sales tax is the only source from which we can hope to secure the revenue necessary to give the children of South Carolina the educational opportunities to which they are entitled. This tax will also provide the increased funds I think you will find it necessary to appropriate for the State government because of the decreased purchasing power of the dollar.

These are controversial subjects. I do not approve of every detail of the bills attached to this Committee report and I do not expect you to do so. But the Committee has rendered a splendid service and I hope you will give to the report careful study and sympathetic consideration.

In recent years steps have been taken to improve our schools but we must do more. We must give to the children of South Carolina opportunities equal to those given to children in other states. We cannot do this if our best qualified teachers go to other states.

Teachers in the public schools of South Carolina must have higher salaries. They should be paid in proportion to their training and ability on a basis more nearly commensurate with the salaries paid for the same qualifications in other states. During recent years neighboring states have taken many of our best teachers away from the children of this state by offering them higher salaries. Many young men and young women trained in

our State institutions to teach would prefer to remain in South Carolina but upon graduation they are offered superior opportunities elsewhere.

Budget proposals in the General Assemblies of Georgia and North Carolina indicate that teaching in those two states will be even more financially attractive next year. It does not make sense for us to appropriate money to State supported colleges to educate teachers and then offer them such low salaries they feel that in justice to themselves they must go to other states. We can not blame the young teachers. As a result of sacrifices by their parents or their own unusual efforts they graduate from college. Then they are offered a salary to teach which is little more than half the compensation paid to young men working as carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and to men in other trades.

We cannot hope now to correct this entirely, but a revision of the salary schedule such as is proposed by this House Committee will go far toward improving the morale of the teachers of the State and thus help the children of the State.

There must be a revision of our school transportation system. From surveys made by State school officials and from inquiries I have made of the transportation system in other states, I am convinced that assumption by the state of transportation facilities would reduce the cost per pupil and would be more efficient. Inquiries as to the state system in North Carolina disclose that the transportation cost per pupil is \$14.12, whereas in South Carolina it is \$29.55 per pupil. Our two states are not so unlike as to justify such a great difference.

School buses should be purchased by a central agency as a result of competitive bidding. Wherever this is done the cost is less than it is in South Carolina.

In North Carolina gasoline is purchased by a central agency as a result of competitive bidding. As a result, the schools of North Carolina pay 15.8 cents per gallon of gasoline to operate their buses, while in this State we are paying the retail price of 28 cents per gallon.

There are a few districts which own their pumps and get the wholesale price, which is not much lower. Of course, either price includes the 7 cent state tax. But even when this tax is deducted, we are still paying more per gallon than North Carolina schools. Paying the State tax results in the transfer of

funds from the transportation of school children to the maintenance of highways. Under the present system, the majority of districts fail to apply for refunds of federal gasoline taxes which are one and one-half cents per gallon.

We are also paying higher prices for the maintenance of buses. Because of central purchasing, North Carolina gets 40% off the list price of replacement parts.

Under state administration school bus routes could be designed to serve children who need the transportation most because of the distance they live from their schools. Definite regulations should be established on this point. Duplication of travel over the same routes also could be eliminated.

There should be provided a formula for allotment which would be fair and just to all counties and not be open to the charge made against the existing formula that it punishes the frugal and rewards the extravagant.

As I stated in my Inaugural Address, a state-wide school building program should be one of South Carolina's first objectives.

Obviously the cost of a building program cannot be met out of current revenues. It must be met by the issuance of bonds. Our splendid highway system would not have been built had not forward looking men recognized that such permanent improvements should be financed by a bond issue. School buildings have a longer life and certainly are no less important than highways.

The program should cover a period of 20 years during which the amount of bonds outstanding should at no time exceed \$75,000,000. The cost of such a long term program makes it essential that the entire state share the expense. In many instances the school districts which need buildings most are the least able to construct them. Some districts never could provide adequate buildings without state assistance.

This is a small state. We are one people. The education of every boy and girl in the rural districts is important to every man and woman in our cities.

Many of the inadequacies of our educational system have contributed to our economic and political ills. Raising the educational level of the State will lift our people economically as well.

Since 1940 we have constructed relatively few school buildings. Consequently, the problem presented us at this time is a serious one.

If the national emergency should make it impractical to proceed with the building program next July, then the revenue earmarked for construction should be placed in the sinking fund until the availability of materials and labor justifies proceeding with the construction.

I realize the argument will be made by some who are opposed to any building program, that there should be no new construction of buildings in view of the pending suit which seeks to abolish the segregation of races in the schools. This argument is not sound.

We need have no fear. Our school buildings will not be wasted. We will find a lawful way of educating all of South Carolina's children and at the same time providing separate schools for the races.

The overwhelming majority of colored people in this State do not want to force their children into white schools. Just as the negro preachers do not want their congregations to leave them and attend the churches of white people, the negro teachers do not want their pupils to leave them and attend schools for white children.

In the days of reconstruction a carpetbag government attempted by law to force a mixing of the races in the schools of this State. Then we were poor and we had in our midst a hostile army of occupation, but the races were never mixed in our schools. The politicians in Washington and the Negro agitators in South Carolina who today seek to abolish segregation in all schools will learn that what a carpetbag government could not do in the reconstruction period, cannot be done in this period.

And the white people of South Carolina will see to it that innocent colored children will not be denied an education because of selfish politicians and misguided agitators.

Of course, the improvement of our school program will necessitate additional revenue. I can think of good arguments against every tax. The question is what tax will provide the necessary funds for essential government purposes and impose the least burden on the taxpayers.

A sales tax is not revolutionary in South Carolina. Nearly 50 per cent of the State's revenue is now raised by selective sales taxes on specific items. Already 28 other states have a general sales tax. However, if a general sales tax is approved, some relief should be granted to taxpayers with lower incomes.

It must not be overlooked that State assistance in the construction of school buildings will to the extent granted lessen the burden of taxes by local governments upon real property.

I realize that the extent of the tax relief to be granted cannot be determined until you have acted upon the budget. I did not participate in the drafting of the budget but I did attend some of the hearings.

Every thoughtful man knows from his own experience that because of the decreased purchasing power of the dollar, it will cost a great deal more during the next fiscal year to continue the same activities of the State government.

The funds for this building program should be administered by a board composed of men of wide business experience who are willing to serve without salary. Men whose training would qualify them for this important task will want no compensation other than the opportunity to serve the children of South Carolina.

I hope the legislature will carefully examine the budget estimates and refuse to make appropriations for any but essential government needs. This is no time to embark upon new activities no matter how meritorious they may seem.

The power to levy taxes upon real and personal property should be reserved to local governments. Today there is great inequity in the assessment of real property for taxation. Every effort now made to secure equalization by assessing property at either its market value or any percentage thereof fails because of the fear that the State may levy taxes upon real property. That fear should be removed by constitutional amendment providing that the State cannot levy taxes upon real property. Then we may be able to enact legislation providing for equalization of assessments which would remove a source of constant irritation to the people.

I recommend the establishment of a merit system for the employees of the State government. The subject has been discussed for some years. We should put an end to the employment of persons purely for political reasons. We should give to efficient employees the feeling of security in their jobs.

I believe that some of the departments and agencies of the government have too many employees. The Budget and Control



Board has power to investigate this subject. I propose to ask that Board to authorize its secretary to make a survey of the various departments to ascertain what reduction in employees can be effected without impairing the efficiency of the service. My hope is that this work can be started in time to be of service to you in your consideration of the Appropriation Bill.

I now wish to repeat my recommendation that the legislature enact a law similar to the Alabama statute prohibiting persons over 16 years of age parading on the streets or highways while masked, and also to prohibit such persons entering upon the premises of a citizen to threaten or intimidate him.

The Democratic Party of South Carolina at its convention last May adopted a resolution urging ratification of a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution providing that no person shall be elected to the office of President of the United States more than twice and no person who has held the office for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to that office more than once. The House of Representatives has passed a Resolution of ratification.

I urge that the Senate likewise ratify the proposed amendment.