

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey  
in broadcast series on  
"The Truth About Civil Rights"

Ladies and Gentlemen, apparently the issue of civil rights, or human rights, has become a subject of partisan debate. Very frankly, this great program of civil rights ought to have bi-partisan support. Both political parties should be dedicated to the fulfillment of equality of opportunity. Both of the American political parties, within the heritage of this great republic, should do everything within their power to forward human brotherhood and equality of opportunity in every walk of life.

I notice, however, of recent date, that the Republican Party and the Republican leadership are laying great claims to advancing in the field of civil rights. In the words of that great old warrior of liberal Democracy, Al Smith, "Let's look at the record."

First of all, may I say that as Mayor of Minneapolis my first public office, I led the fight in my community for a Mayor's Council on Human Relations, for a community self survey in the field of human rights, and also was able to get adoption of the first municipal fair employment practices ordinance, with enforcement powers. Many of you may recall my participation in the Democratic Convention of 1948. You may recall that at that time I spoke up for a strong Civil Rights plank. I said this: There are those who say this issue of civil rights is an infringement on state's rights. The time has arrived for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of state's rights and to walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.

Now nothing has happened during the ensuing eight years that has caused me to retreat or equivocate on the position I held then. In fact, much has happened during these years that renders action on civil rights inescapably urgent now if ever America needs leadership in this field. It needs leadership and action not only in Congress, it needs it in the office of the President. It needs it in every courthouse, in every City Hall, in every State Legislature, and in every State House.

Now many of you may know that I have tried to the best of my ability as a member of the Senate along with many other Senators -- Senator Douglas of Illinois, Lehman of New York, Senator Morse of Oregon, Senator Neuberger, Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, Senator Green of Rhode Island, Senator McNamara of Michigan, and others, to work for and to promote a comprehensive program of civil rights. We introduced eleven bills in this field, in the 81st, 82nd, 83rd and 84th Congresses - bills to establish equality of opportunity employment - a commission on civil rights to outlaw the poll tax - bills to protect persons within the United States against lynching or violence - bills to establish a congressional joint committee on civil rights - to establish a separate section of the Department of Justice on civil rights - and many others.

Some of these bills have been reported out of committee - favorably; but only when you had a democratically controlled Congress. The Republican 80th Congress, and the Republican 83rd Congress did absolutely nothing in the field of civil rights. Even nothing to the point of holding little or no hearings - I recall only one hearing in the 83rd Congress.

Now let me examine with you just for a moment - why these bills haven't become law. I'll tell you why - because back in the 81st Congress, the Republicans under the leadership of the late Senator from Nebraska, the Republican leader Kenneth Wherry - Senator Wherry joined with a few Southern Democrats to foist upon the Senate the so-called Wherry resolution, the so-called filibuster rule - a rule that permits filibusters and doesn't stop them. This is Rule 22.

Now Rule 22 is the grave digger of civil rights. It's got to go. The Congress should be permitted to act. The majority should be permitted to

act. The duty of the Congress is to legislate and not procrastinate. Filibusters are unbecoming of a Democratic society, and we Democrats pledge ourselves in our platform, and we pledge ourselves personally, to lead the fight for the changing of the Senate rules so that the majority of the Congress can take action in the field of civil rights.

And then I say there has been some comment as to the chairmanship of certain committees. Some of our Republican friends have said, if you elect Democrats, you can't expect any civil rights legislation because a southerner will be a chairman of the Judiciary Committee. May I reply to my Republican friends, that if they will be kind enough to give us but four votes, four out of their total - we can report civil rights legislation from any Committee. And if they will cooperate with us on changing the rules, we can change the rule so the majority can act. The truth is, that the Republican leadership and the Republican members have joined in a program of blocking and obstructing civil rights legislation, and it is their duty - may I say - and their moral responsibility, in light of their pious pronouncements on civil rights - to join hands with those of us of the Democratic party, a majority of our party, that wants civil rights legislation.

Now let's compare these two records of these two parties. First of all, I think it is fair to say that it was Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman who really heralded a golden era of human rights. These two great democratic presidents added humanity to the science of government. They made government work for you and not just for the few. I'll cite the record. Democrats open top quality jobs to qualified persons of all races. Democrats ended discrimination in federal employment as early as 1940. Democrats fathered the FEPC - we Democrats desegregated the Armed Services despite the claims of this administration - today's armed services integration was ordered by President Harry S. Truman, and if you will look at the record you will find that it was Dwight Eisenhower, yes, it was Dwight Eisenhower who in his testimony of April 2, 1948, before the Armed Services Committee of the Senate - opposed integration in the Army. It was Democrats who appointed liberal justices to the Supreme Court, who gave new vitality to the opinions of the court.

And I think it is fair to say it is the Democratic Party that has always had in its platform a strong civil rights plank. Now what is the GOP promise? Well, in 1952 it promised action in the field of civil rights - federal anti-lynch legislation, federal anti-poll tax legislation - FEPC - well what did it do? Nothing. It failed to even support Democratic anti-lynch legislation. It failed to mention anti-lynch legislation in its 1956 program, or platform. I failed to support Democratic anti-poll tax bills in 1955, or even any Republican bills. And in 1956, the Republican platform is strangely silent on any anti-poll tax legislation.

President Eisenhower personally opposed FEPC legislation, despite the fact that his platform of 1952 called for it, and he has failed, and the Republican party has failed to mention fair employment practices in their 1956 platform. What about the Democratic Party?

The Democratic Party of 1956, in its platform, pledges itself to continue its efforts to eliminate discriminations of all kinds in relationship to the full rights to vote - full rights to engage in gainful occupation - full rights to enjoy security of person - the Republican platform says nothing on any of these items. President Eisenhower has failed to present any civil rights program to the Congress during his first three and a half years in office. He failed to support Democratic civil rights bills, introduced in 1955, and he waited until election year, a few months before the end of Congress, to even present a watered-down version of the Democratic proposals.

Now Adlai Stevenson has an enviable and great record in the field of civil rights. He desegregated the Illinois National Guard when he was governor. He ordered desegregation of schools in the southern part of his state. He called out the National Guard to protect Negroes against violence in the Cicero area. He has gone on record unqualifiedly, for the Supreme Court decision ordering segregation unconstitutional and ordering integration in our schools.

But President Eisenhower says it makes no difference whether or not I endorse the Supreme Court decision. But I submit it does. Eisenhower has failed to use the power and prestige of his high office to create a claimant for peaceful integration. Eisenhower has failed to even call a conference of Negro and white leaders - civic leaders - to seek the path of peaceful integration. President Eisenhower has failed to protect Negro voters in the south. He has failed to speak up in behalf of equality of opportunity, and to use the great power of his office - yes, the majesty of his office, to speak out in behalf of observance and compliance with the Supreme Court decision and the civil rights statutes.

That's the record. And I think that when you study it you will vote for Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver, you will vote Democratic.

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