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Guest (s): Rep. Robert T. Ashmore (D-SC)

Title: Effect of Civil Rights Legislation on Business, Especially in the South

Note: Questions were paraphrased and/or shortened by the transcriber. For the exact question, please consult the audiotapes.

Morphew: Introduction...with regard to efforts to enact civil rights legislation, will there be some impact on business in the south?

Ashmore: Yes, I do. I think that particularly in our piedmont area of the Carolinas, we have had historically fine relations between the races, between the colored people and the white people. And as a result of that, at least partially as a result of that, we have brought in many new industries to that area. It's going fast, and I think that if the industrialists did not believe that we could get along well among our own selves, the people who live there, the colored and the white, they would not come and invest their money there.

Morphew: How can there be any business connections if, as the national media is arguing, these civil rights measures only pertain to voting rights measures?

Ashmore: Well, I don't see that that will have any bearing on the business connection, the business relationship of the peoples. These civil rights bills that are pending, the current bills, are held out in many occasions as merely or simply a bill to give everybody the right to vote, but that is not true. That is just one of the various provisions. I don't know of any congressman in the South, very few anywheres (sic) for that matter, who opposes the Negro having the right to vote providing he is qualified to vote under the laws of the state where he resides. And that is not the reason I oppose the present civil rights legislation. It has nothing to do with it. I oppose it for various reasons, but one in particular is because it goes much further than just a simple voting right or the right to vote. It puts the federal government in control of your state election machinery which historically has been and under the constitutions for that matter, a matter for states to control. We have always conducted our own state elections even from the lowest office and township or school district up to the election of a United States senator or governor or congressman. If the federal government comes in and takes control, we will lose that right.

Morphew: In other words, the news media has been misrepresentative by arguing that these bills are only designed as voting measures.

Ashmore: That is absolutely false impression that has been put out and is being circulated in many instances throughout the country. It is not true. It goes much further than that.

Morphew: This would be an extinction of federal power into other areas.

Ashmore: An *extension* of federal power. You didn't say 'extinction' did you?

Morphew: No sir.

Ashmore: An extension is correct. That is what many of us who believe in states rights do not want. There has been too much centralization in the federal government up to this date. The decisions of the Supreme Court of late and legislation has for that matter, has usurped and taken from the states and the local people and citizenship many of the rights that our founding fathers put into the hands of the local people. It appears to me that the Tenth Amendment, which provides for states rights and is known as the states rights amendment is being almost completely ignored, it's being forgotten and it's just about vanished and being relegated to the trashcan now, and that I oppose vigorously.

Morphew: Why is it important to a state's industrial growth for it to maintain as much control as possible?

Ashmore: Well, there are many facets to that question, but I think one of the primary reasons why you want to retain control in the states and in the local communities is because of taxation. Industry is not going to a state or to an area where the legislature is inclined to put unjust or unreasonable taxes on people or on industry and on commerce. That is one of the first things a new industry inquires into, what type legislature do you have, what kind of tax laws, inheritance taxes and income taxes and things of that kind?

Morphew: And whether an industry comes into a state has to do not only with availability of raw materials and labor but what kind of legislation they are going to have to contend with?

Ashmore: That is correct. It certainly is. In our area, we have found that our people believe in giving a good day's work for a good day's pay. We have a very high percentage of Anglo-Saxon citizenship in the piedmont area of the Carolinas and industry has found that those people do not mind working when they are well-paid and that they can turn out more goods and more products than most other people in other areas of the country.

Morphew: Since WWII the entire south has seen an upsurge in industrial growth, so you think civil rights legislation may be coming from economic sour grapes on the part of northerners?

Ashmore: Well, we have been accused of that. I don't know in many instances I think that we could prove that they are wrong. That it is not true. Industry, it doesn't close down a plant in one area of the country and go into complete liquidation and move a thousand miles or several hundred miles away to another area unless it has very sound reasons for doing so. And the labor troubles and the dissension and ill will that has grown up among various segments of our population has helped to bring about that. And they come to our area because our people do get along and were having the finest sort of relationship, peaceful with one another, good will existed between both races up until a few years ago when so much agitation started by some of the organizations that are continuing to agitate and create ill will where we used to have good will and fine relations.

Morphew: Is some of this drive for civil rights legislation an effort to punish the south for this economic upsurge?

Ashmore: Well, that is possible and very likely. There is a great deal of evidence that that is true. However, it seems to me that there might be something a little stronger in this upsurge and in this tremendous movement than that. And I can't help but believe that the greatest force today behind the civil rights problem, the civil rights legislation that is being pushed forward, is politics. Too many people are trying to vote for what they believe to be political expediency. What can I get out of it? How many votes can I get if I support this type legislation? To my way of thinking, political expediency is one of the greatest sins in our government today.

Morphew: Do you think that if people throughout the nation knew these bills would affect people outside of the south, they would change their mind?

Ashmore: That is absolutely correct. They will learn that if these bills become law. Sooner or later it will be a good lesson to many of those who think that they are just punishing the south or think that we are unfair in our treatment of certain peoples when as a matter of fact we are not. They will learn that a law in one area of this land is also a law in the other area and wherever you might go it will be, I'm sure, enforced to the same degree.

Morphew: I noticed some population surveys the other day showing a tremendous increase in the colored populations in northern cities and perhaps some decline in your South Carolina and Mississippi and throughout the South...will this have an equalizing effect so that the people throughout the country will know what the problems of the south are?

Ashmore: I think that the only way for the people up North, East, South, West, or wherever they might be, Europe, Asia, Africa or any spot in the world, the only way people can learn about the problems and the individual troubles that exist among different peoples is to go there and see what exists. Experience it. Self experience is the only way that you can learn those things. And many of these people who are telling the world how the South should do and how they should live and taking extreme cases and making it appear that that is the normal way of doing, they know nothing about what the conditions

are at all. It would be almost like me trying to tell the coalminers of West Virginia how to operate their business. I know nothing about it. And many of these people in various areas of the country have never been to the South. They have never had to live with any people other than one race or certainly not with the nigger race or the underprivileged people, as they might be called, and when they do live with them and when they do experience what we have experienced since the nigger was brought here from Africa, they will know more about our problems, they will be able to appreciate our problems, and I think that many of them will sympathize with us because I have good grounds for that. Many northerners or many westerners, people from other areas of the country who come south very, very seldom, very often, come around and say, well, I didn't know the situation until I got here. Now, I think you are right.