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58 x 7 – Mississippi Progress

Date: 2/16/58

Guest: Joe T. Patterson

Morphew: Thanks to Sanders for filling in last week, welcome to the state's AG, Joe Patterson...you have been talking to civic clubs throughout Mississippi that have created quite a bit of discussion...what has been the theme of these discussions?

Patterson: Well, I have chosen to call it, 'Have Faith in Mississippi,' and try to show about a 25 or 30 minute talk, the tremendous progress that the state of Mississippi has made since becoming a state of this Union and then of course we had to start all over after 1865 and rebuild our state, the progress we've made during that time.

Morphew: In other words, we've had quite a bit of criticism lately, some of it justified but quite a bit of it undeserved, that we've needed something to strike a balance, to show that we've really made quite a bit of progress, despite some of the criticism leveled at us.

Patterson: Yes sir. Our state, our leaders, our senators, our congressmen, our governors, and in fact, our people as a whole, we have been a conservative people. Ever since Mississippi has been admitted to this Union it has been a strong advocate of conservative, constitutional government. They have stood out and refused to become a party to this so-called left wing tendencies and embrace the so-called new order. Naturally, they find themselves the subject of bitter abuse quite often, wholly unwarranted.

Morphew: And economically, Mississippi has come 'a good ways down the ladder' since it became a state until the present time

Patterson: They certainly have. I don't consider myself old yet, but when I first came to the legislature in nineteen hundred and thirty-two, almost unbelievable, the state budget for that year was \$20 million dollars and in nineteen hundred and fifty-six, a hundred and eighty-three million dollars.

Morphew: That's an increase of more than nine times

Patterson: And of course, this biennial session it'll even exceed the hundred and eighty-three million.

Morphew: When it first became a state, we were one of the richest states in the country and then after the war between the states, we were one of the poorest states in the Union

Patterson: Reduced to absolute poverty and of course treated as a conquered land. I point out in my talk, not attempting to be critical but it's a matter of fact, if the southland could have been treated at the close of the civil war by our great government in just one tenth the fashion that the nations of Germany, Italy and Japan have been treated since the close of World War II in the way of economic aid, well of course our section of the country would be many, many miles ahead of where it is now.

Morphew: The southern states have been targets of abuse in economics, educations, race relations, and other fields where money enters into it and also the basic theory of government. Why is this so?

Patterson: I think it's because the southern leaders and the southern people cling to the basic principles of constitutional government and refuse to embrace these departures from a constitutional form of government as it was laid out and intended.

Morphew: If the South continues in this vein, will it spread to the rest of the country?

Patterson: I don't think there's any doubt about it. I have great faith in the American people as a whole. And I don't believe even to this good day that these left wing tendencies in government is the wishes of the vast majority of the American people. That's brought about by your minority, political, bloc voters.

Morphew: What is it going to change to get it changed?

Patterson: Well, I think, first place, of course we've got to hold the line ourselves, and then I think these others, other people in other sections of the country, will eventually assert themselves and take more interest in who represents them in the halls of the American Congress and who holds their political offices in their states.

Morphew: Recent bill in the Senate by Sen. Douglas of Illinois that would set aside money for schools in the South to help enforce the Supreme Court decision to integrate the schools. What do you think of a measure like this?

Patterson: Well, I think that's just a pious, hypocritical, political move on the part of Senator Douglas that he is so capable of performing. Frankly, if I were Senator Douglas, I would sit down and carefully read this book entitled, *Barbarians in Our Midst*, which is a factual story of gangsterism and corruption in government in Chicago and Cooke county, that's his hometown and county and he's got a very fertile field for crusading there, far more fertile than for crusading in Mississippi and other southern states. If he wants to be sincere and really help somebody, he ought to start helping the people in his own home county and town and state.

Morphew: One of the first comments made after the introduction of this bill was from Senator Robertson of Virginia, who said merely, we are not for sale.

Patterson: Yes, well, I think he would find that out too.

Morphew: We're kind of straying from our topic of Mississippi's progress...you've done research on the financial status of the state since the war between the states and since the depression of the twenties and thirties. Interesting facts?

Patterson: Well, I have some here that I could briefly run over, of course there are many: the resources, our industrial development, the development of oil, the many industries that have come into our state. I was just talking with the general counsel for Ingalls Shipbuilding in my office last week. Frankly, I was surprised to know that they alone employ over 7,000 people in their one operation down on the Gulf Coast. It's also interesting to note that over 90 percent of that 7,000 people are Mississippians and come from practically every one of the 82 counties. That's just one and of course we have many others. Of course, your bank figures, bank deposits reflect, of course, the financial standing of a people. I got these figures from the state banking department back some several months ago, which showed that 20 years ago in 182 state banks there was a total deposits of \$118,180,000. And on June 6, of fifty-seven, in 169 state banks, we had \$730,357,000. And I saw here only a week or two ago where for the first time since I guess Reconstruction, our state bank deposits exceed \$1 billion. Now that's state banks alone, and of course your national banks which are a lot fewer in number but they have had a proportionate increase which shows that the people of Mississippi today have in their state and national banks well in excess of one billion dollars. Certainly that economy, that money belongs to the people of Mississippi, and certainly they are in much better shape than they were just even 10 or 15 years ago.

Morphew: What about education...do you have figures on that?

Patterson: Yes sir and that's very interesting. In 1946, just 10 years ago, the state appropriated twenty-three million dollars for the support and maintenance of the common schools. In 1956, they appropriated seventy-eight million, six hundred and ninety thousand. That's just over a ten year period. And of course in the present session of the legislature, they're going to be increased again, the only bone of contention seems to be whether it will be some eighty-odd million or even go to a hundred million.

Morphew: Strides in Negro education?

Patterson: The figures with reference to our negras to me are most interesting. I'd like to run over these figures right hurriedly. We have a total negra enrollment in the public schools of our state of 268,000. We have a total white enrollment of 276,000. We have 1413 negra grade and high schools. We have 7,075 negra teachers in our grade and high schools alone.

Morphew: That's just in Mississippi.

Patterson: I understand that's more negra teachers than you'll find in Michigan, Illinois, and New York put together. Now, the average salary of those grade teachers in our negra schools is \$2443 a year. The average salary of a high school teacher in those negra schools is \$2688 a year with the superintendents getting an average salary of \$4880 a year. I had this figured up for me in the Department of Education: the total salaries paid negra teachers in the Mississippi grade and high schools alone annually is \$16,292,672.21. And I'd like to point out right now that when these agitators come into our midst and get up before these colored organizations and go to talking about the integration of public schools I've never yet seen one of those agitators tell the negra teachers in Mississippi where they're going to get a substitute for that kind of a payroll.

Morphew: In other words, that's doesn't include other employees?

Patterson: That doesn't count the negra teachers in the junior and senior colleges, neither does it count the negra bus drivers. There's 104,000 out of 243,000 pupils that are being transported in Mississippi today, 104,000 of them are negras and negra bus drivers are driving those buses, so if you will take that \$16,292,000 figure, add to it your negra teachers in your junior and senior colleges and your bus drivers, you will find that the Mississippi negra is getting from the educational system of Mississippi alone in the vicinity of \$20 million and I don't believe that the sensible negras of Mississippi, and we've got lots of them, I don't believe that they're going to forfeit and throw overboard that kind of a solid annual payroll in the administrating of their public schools just to gratify some agitators whose sole purpose is to get him to be a qualified elector so he can make a bloc voter out of him and that's all he wants with him.

Morphew: Thanks....