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### THE FUTURE OF TOBACCO

There are a lot of people here today who, like myself, grew up in eastern North Carolina. We have seen a lot of changes over the years, but we still grow collards and tobacco. We still work hard and are proud of it. Most of all, us eastern North Carolinians share a sense of pride and the firm belief that we inhabit the best piece of earth on the globe.

I have been asked to speak on tobacco today, but I hope that this will not make me ineligible when it comes time to eat collards. I want to talk about the past, the present, and the future of tobacco, and there is no more fitting platform than here in Ayden, in the heart of flue-cured tobacco land.

First of all, in my lifetime, and in many of yours, tobacco farming has changed--it has revolutionized. When I grew up, mules pulled the slides through the fields, and primers bent over for lugs in the heat of the summer. The mules are nearly all gone, and we increasingly use machines to do our work.

Yet, our tobacco culture is still characterized by small farms. While wheat, soybeans, corn, and cotton have been almost completely mechanized and have evolved into gigantic operations, tobacco farmers still can make money on a few acres. Tobacco is a cash crop. According to 1978 figures, on an acre of tobacco you can still make over \$2,000--while cotton yields only \$303, corn \$183, soybeans \$162, and wheat \$71.

It takes a lot of work to get in a barn of tobacco. I don't need to remind you of that! The government estimates that it takes over 258 hours of labor per harvested acre to get in the tobacco crop, while it takes but 21 for cotton, 3 for food grains, and 4 for feed grains. The government reports do not discuss how one gets covered with sticky tar or how the dew chills you in the morning and the sun bakes you all day.

When I tell people up north about how hard it is to barn tobacco, they ask me why farmers even bother. And I tell them, because people back home are tobacco farmers; they love to see the plants grow and turn yellow; they love to smell it curing; they love to take the cured golden tobacco to market; they love the sound and excitement of the auction. Farming, whether it is tobacco or collards, is a way of life that gets

hold of you. "Those who labor in the earth," Thomas Jefferson observed, "are the chosen people of God." I agree.

Somehow, over the past twenty years, some people have confused the controversy over smoking and health with the growing of tobacco. We grow tobacco because people want to use it. If we don't grow it, then farmers in Rhodesia, in Canada, in Korea, and in other countries certainly will. Attacking the tobacco farmer and the tobacco program is misdirected. If there is a demand for tobacco, which there is, then we people from North Carolina who grow the best tobacco in the world, should be producing it. My job, as I see it, is to be tobacco's advocate in the Senate. It is a responsibility that I take seriously and one that gives me great pleasure. When I look out across this crowd and think of what is at stake, it redoubles my determination.

Let me discuss some of the changes that have occurred and how I think we can face them. For one thing, there has been a drastic change in the rural-urban balance in Congress.

Today, most Congressmen and Senators come from urban areas. They do not understand the concerns of rural people. I have attempted to educate my colleagues and their aides by

sponsoring a Congressional Tour of North Carolina--especially of our tobacco farms. I believe that if anyone visits our homes, our farms, our markets, and our factories that they will see that tobacco farmers are good people. And this is exactly what I have heard from the people who have made the tour. I congratulate you for making these visitors feel at home, for showing them some good old southern hospitality.

There are other changes that will affect the future of tobacco. We continue to witness changes in farming techniques. We see more of the old flue type tobacco barns falling into disrepair; we see more mechanical harvesting and curing equipment; we see less need for hand labor. There will be increasing pressure on small farmers to adopt the expensive new techniques. This will be particularly difficult with inflation pushing up prices of equipment and of labor. But I have hope that one of our great traditions--the family farm--will endure. And I will fight the battle in the Senate to guarantee it.

I am sure that you are very interested in what is going to happen in Congress concerning the tobacco program. Let me assure you that the tobacco program is one of the most efficient programs run by the federal government. There is simply no need to change a program that works.

I have been encouraged in the past few years by our success in protecting the tobacco program. The first year that I was in the Senate, in 1975, there were three amendments offered by Senator Frank Moss to kill the tobacco program. He tried to attach these amendments to the Emergency Farm Bill. All three of these amendments lost by large margins. I realized then that the best policy was to work to prevent any amendment from reaching the Senate floor. In 1976, Senator Moss again tried to defeat the tobacco program, but he lost again.

Although we were successful in defeating these attempts to kill the tobacco program, I began to work closely not only with rural Senators but with urban Senators as well. I sought to understand their problems, and I also began to educate them on our rural problems. I think that I made some headway. There has not been a floor amendment offered since 1976. I don't want to lull you into a false sense of security, however, for there are plenty of people who still confuse the health-related issues with tobacco growing. But I do think that our educational program has been successful, and the Congressional Tour has opened many eyes to rural problems.

Anyone who visits with us and sees our heritage will immediately realize that our tobacco farmers are a proud people.

We are proud of our tobacco farms, proud of the hard work, proud to be farmers. Our tobacco heritage goes all the way back to the founding of Jamestown in 1607.

There are also other problems that I have become interested in recently. You know that increasingly there has been imported into the country what is called "scrap" tobacco. It is not really scrap at all but is actually good quality tobacco that has been "manipulated" by shredding it to meet a customs category. I have worked closely with Mr. John Sledge of the North Carolina Farm Bureau in fighting this customs ruling, and I will continue to do all that I can to end this distortion of customs rules.

We are also facing increasing competition from around the world. Rhodesia has recently come back on the world market, and their leaf is of high quality. Other countries can put in a crop of tobacco cheaper than we can, for they have a much cheaper labor supply. Yet we still continue to grow the best quality tobacco leaf in the world, and I am sure that we can continue to compete with the world when it comes to tobacco.

So, in conclusion, let me say that I think the future of tobacco is bright. We overcame the disaster of the Great Depression and under President Franklin D. Roosevelt set up a

a program that works for tobacco farmers. Although there have been challenges in Congress, I think that the program is the best witness for itself; it works--effectively and efficiently.

Tobacco farmers are hardy people. We have preserved the tradition of family farms in a world that is getting increasingly complex. We have continued to work hard in the fields when machines are dominating agriculture in other sections of the country. We have also made changes in our technology. The days of mules are gone, and modernization will continue. I trust that farmers will see their way clear to compete in this new age.

I wish that all critics of tobacco could come to visit with us. I wish that they could be here at the Collard Festival and witness what good old southern living is all about. We in the South, in North Carolina, have a good way of life. We know about the good things in life, and we celebrate them. Rest assured that I will do all that I can to protect our way of life. I love our state and its heritage, and this includes our tobacco farmers, our collard farmers, and all the other people who earn their living from the soil.