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M'KEITHEN ADDRESSES DINNER

Independent La. Pledged

By DAVID SNYDER

Twelve hundred well-wishers crowded into the winner's circle last night to honor a victorious governor and speculate on his future as a possible contender in the arena of national politics.

Mayor Victor H. Schiro, who acted as master of ceremonies at the \$100-a-plate "appreciation dinner" in the Grand Ballroom of the Jung Hotel, was the most optimistic concerning the future of Gov. John J. McKeithen.

"There is no office he wishes that he would not be able to get," said the mayor. "There is nothing he couldn't accomplish."

THE MAYOR RELATED that some recent out-of-state conventioners in New Orleans were so impressed by McKeithen that they expressed regret they could not vote for him.

"They will have that chance one of these days," Schiro predicted—"an opportunity to vote for our governor on a national basis."

As for McKeithen, he was at his humble best, expressing appreciation to the voters for taking him on as governor four years ago, rough edges and all.

"You took me four years ago . . . green . . . country . . . north Louisiana . . . hillbilly . . . redneck . . ."

THE PACKED BALLROOM hummed with a ripple of laughter as the governor threw down the string of self-effacing adjectives, one by one. It was the kind of speech that had made McKeithen the most popular governors to come onto the Louisiana political scene in years.

The governor said he had worked "awfully close" with the city during his first term in office and had learned to love New Orleans and its people.

"I almost burst into tears in gratitude . . . when the first returns came in last Saturday from New Orleans," he said.

AT THE HEAD TABLE with the mayor were former Gov. Terry Sanford of North Carolina, who delivered the main address; U.S. Rep. F. Edward Hebert; State Sen. Michael H. O'Keefe, a McKeithen floor leader and honorary banquet chairman; Capt. Neville Levy, general chairman; Archbishop Philip M. Hannan, and the Rev. Benedict A. Galloway, pastor of Rayne Memorial Methodist Church.

Immediately in front of the speakers' platform, scattered at a few front tables, was the handful of New Orleans politicians who supported McKeithen when his name was practically unknown to New Orleans voters five years ago. Prominent among them was Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison.

Scattered through the rest of the hall were the state office holders and incumbent legislators. Most of them could trace their easy first-primary victories Saturday to the governor's vote-getting ability.

M'KEITHEN REITERATED a favorite theme: that Louisiana has shaken off the antebellum past and is claiming its rightful place in the sun.

"There is nobility in our cause," said McKeithen. "There will be right in our method. Our state stands poised on the launching pad of earth and the countdown is ending. Let us go now to claim the stars."

But the most enthusiastic applause came in response to a statement by the governor concerning those who would attempt to overthrow the law.

"The time has come for the empty cliché, meaningless mumbo jumbo couched in pseudo-philosophy or frenzied invective, to be silent forever. For while we love with our hearts it is with our minds that we must reason and think and give meaning to our own existence.

"NOR WILL THIS state be a haven for those who would disrupt the law — or those who would be the law. There is no place in Louisiana for the mob, regardless of the cause it espouses, the costumes it wears or the color of its skin."

McKeithen emphasized that "because we are a state reborn, we say to the rest of these United States that never again may Louisiana be safely put into a bottle like some biological specimen because of where we lie upon a map.

"Nor can anyone safely give to us attributes that belong to a yesterday, that we did not forge, and by doing so deny to us a tomorrow that we have earned with blood and toil."

He gave notice that the state would follow an independent course in politics.

"NOR MUST ANY political entity or party look for Louisiana to blindly join in a game of follow-the-leader based on historic precedent or geographic locales.

"Louisiana is a part of this union, but within those constitutional confines we must follow that course that is best first for America but also for the people of Louisiana."

He called for the healing of any wounds that might have come out of the governor's office.

SANFORD CALLED McKeithen one of the top 10 governors of the United States.

He said the key to better American government is better state government. "State government must prepare for greater responsibility and insist on a greater share of the public responsibility if our federal system is to survive."

"You cannot expect your state to jump ahead without state leadership. We cannot expect a higher quality of life in the South without state leadership," said Sanford.

"You understand this. The reelection of Gov. McKeithen demonstrates your understanding. Louisiana is on the way."

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—States-Item photo.
GOV. JOHN J. M'KEITHEN, right, honoree at a banquet last night at the Jung Hotel, is shown with the main speaker, former North Carolina GOV. TERRY SANFORD.