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148 Pee Dee legislators critique Haley's address

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
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FLORENCE — Some state legislators from the Pee Dee praised the tone of Gov. Nikki Haley's State of the State address, but others said her speech lacked substance. Haley spoke at length about tragedies that marred South Carolina in 2015, and made proposals to the General Assembly on key issues expected

to create contentious debate this year.

Among the highlights was a plan to pass legislation that will permanently dedicate up to 1 percent of the state's bond capacity to K-12

education facilities. Here's how some Pee Dee lawmakers reacted:

Rep. Robert Williams, D-Darlington:

It's quite evident the Republicans are in the driver's seat. They have the steering wheel but they're not driving, and

that's why we're in the shape

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education facilities.

Haley also called out the Senate on its consistent inaction on ethics reform. She also said her views on infrastructure funding have not changed since her 2015 address — that includes a Department of Transportation overhaul, a decrease in state income taxes and no additional tax increases.

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STATE OF THE STATE

Strength in unity



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS
 South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley holds back tears while delivering the State of the State in the House chambers at the South Carolina Statehouse on Wednesday in Columbia.

Governor Haley holds up survivors of tragedies as role models

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley asked legislators Wednesday to follow the inspirational example of the victims and survivors of last year's tragedies to make South Carolina stronger.

In her State of the State address, Haley continued the theme of her State of the Union response last week

in referencing State of the the June shoot- State address. ing deaths of nine parishioners at a historic black church in Charleston.

"There is greatness in South Carolina, a greatness embodied by our people, a greatness unequaled in our country," the nation's youngest governor said on her 44th birthday. "It

ONLINE

Visit scnow.com for the full text from Gov. Haley's

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South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley (center) greets Rep. Terry Alexander, D-Florence (right), at the conclusion of the State of the State in the House Chambers at the South Carolina Statehouse on Wednesday in Columbia.

148 With Confederate flag gone, King Day rally shifts focus

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — For the first time in 17 years, civil rights leaders gathered Monday at the South Carolina Statehouse to pay homage to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. without the Confederate flag casting a long shadow over them.

The banner was taken down over the summer after police said a young white man who had posed for photos with a rebel flag shot nine black church members to death during a Bible study in Charleston. After the massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Republican Gov. Nikki Haley reversed course and made it a priority for lawmakers to pass legislation to remove the flag.

"Isn't this a great day? It's so nice to be standing here and not looking at that flag," said Ezell Pittman, who attended most of the King Day anti-flag rallies since they started in 2000. "I always had faith it would come down. I hate it took what it did, but was real happy to see it go."

Across the country, the 30th anniversary of the holiday to honor the civil rights leader assassinated in 1968 was remembered in different ways. In Michigan, people delivered bottled water to residents of Flint amid the city's drinking water crisis. In Atlanta, an overflow crowd listened as to the nation's housing secretary talk about the 50th anniversary of King's visit to Chicago to launch a campaign for fair housing. In Minnesota, a rally against police brutal-

ity briefly shut down traffic on a bridge that spans the

Mississippi River.

South Carolina NAACP President Lonnie Randolph said the flag's removal was tangible evidence the state cares about civil rights when pushed hard enough. But he warned there would be other fights ahead.

"I promise you, the people that gather in this building — your building — will do something this year to cause us to return to ensure freedom, justice and equality is made possible for all people," Randolph said, motioning toward the capitol behind him.

Randolph promised to keep coming to the Statehouse until King's dream comes to its full meaning

in a state with wide gaps in education achievement between school districts in rich, white communities and poorer, black ones, and where the governor and Republican-dominated Legislature have refused to take federal money to expand Medicaid.

About 1,000 people gathered at the Statehouse on



Clinton

a clear, cold day, drawn in part by appearances by all three main Democratic presidential candidates — Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Martin O'Malley.

Sanders reminded the crowd King was a dynamic leader who wanted to help the poor. O'Malley said King would be ashamed his county has made it harder to vote and easier to buy a gun.

Only Clinton dealt directly with the flag. She credit-

ed Haley and the Republicans with working with the NAACP after the church shooting and choosing King's legacy over hatred.

"We couldn't celebrate him and the Confederacy. We had to choose," Clinton said. "And South Carolina made the right choice."

In the nation's capital,

President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama followed the King Day theme of community service by planting vegetable seeds at a District of Columbia elementary school to honor the civil rights leader and celebrate Mrs. Obama's anti-childhood obesity initiative.

They also stuffed bags with books for needy children along with young people who participate in a White House mentoring program and volunteers from the AmeriCorps national service program.

Elsewhere, an overflow crowd showed up at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta to celebrate its former pastor's legacy at an annual commemorative service.

While people have been distracted by TV reality shows and music "that tears down instead of uplifts," many injustices have occurred and "we're about to create right here in this civilized society the wild, wild west with guns," said King's daughter, the Rev. Bernice King.

"Y'all, we can't keep being distracted, because if you're not careful, we're about to allow a reality show host to bully himself into becoming president of the United States of America," she said.

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Attendees hold a portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. during the King Day at the Dome event Monday in Columbia.



Democratic presidential candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt, arrives to the King Day at the Dome event celebrating the life of Martin Luther King Jr., Monday in Columbia.

Obama's divide? Share that blame

Considering the stubbornness of his opposition, I thought President Barack Obama was being quite generous to express "regrets" over his role in Washington's dysfunction.

"It's one of the few regrets of my presidency," he said, "that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better."

He shouldn't be too hard on himself, in my view. When it comes to stirring "rancor and suspicion," he had plenty of assistance from his stubbornly resistant conservative adversaries.

I am not one to complain, as many Obama supporters do, that the nation's first black president has had a rougher road than any previous president. Who can forget the blizzard of allegations, myths and rumors that were showered on Bill and Hillary Clinton during his presidency?

Expect more of the same if his wife is nominated for the presidency this year, as expected.

Obama should have expected no less, as I wrote at the time of his first inaugural: Nobody promised him a rose garden, except for the big, official one behind the White House.

Sure, both parties try to block their rivals' agendas. That's politics.

But as Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein point out in their book, "It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism," there has been a glaring difference in recent years in Congress.

While today's congressional Democrats will boast about their ability to work with Republicans to get things done, Mann and Ornstein point out, Republicans who work across the aisle risk condemnation and even



Clarence Page

Tribune Content Agency

primary-election challenges from their fellow Republicans.

The result has been gridlock, shutdowns, saber rattling and brinkmanship, emboldened by a Republican race to the farthest-right positions.

Small wonder, then, that Obama called for an end to gerrymandering, a system that, as Obama said, draws "congressional districts so that politicians can pick their voters and not the other way around."

Nevertheless, Obama's own rise benefited from a gerrymander in the Illinois Senate, as Ryan Lizza chronicled in the *New Yorker* in 2008. Political scientists also disagree on how much gerrymandering contributes to polarization compared to other factors.

Obama also called for campaign finance reform, even though he made the reforms passed after the Watergate scandal obsolete in 2008 when he raised more money over the Internet than he would have been allowed had he accepted federal matching funds.

The fact is that Obama, burdened by the triple-header of two wars and a recession, never got anything resembling a break from conservative Republicans.

Quite the opposite, a "tea party" movement that long had been a small, easily ignored rump group suddenly exploded in national growth, prominence and influence.

Was that Obama's fault? Has his presidency actually made relations between the races and other groups more angry than

before? Or is it that having a black president makes some people, as Obama in his second memoir quotes an unnamed Illinois state senator as putting it, "feel more white?"

I suspect the latter. Yes, Obama might have done more to reach out to his opposition. He had more of a chance before Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress.

But, as the president said in his address, he cannot heal the divide alone. The rest of us have to do our part.

In that sense, I admire the other most-quoted speech of the evening, the Republican response by South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley. She took a lot of heat from fellow Republicans for her not-too-subtle criticism of Republican front-runner Donald Trump, in particular, for his divisive rhetoric.

She was even called a RINO, a "Republican in Name Only," for criticizing Trump, who was easily identified despite her omitting his name. Conservative columnist-author Ann Coulter even tweeted that Haley, a native-born American child of Indian Sikh parents, should be deported.

Yet Haley set the sort of standard for civil discourse that establishment mainstream Republicans are trying, despite Trump's antics, to revive.

"Some people think that you have to be the loudest voice in the room to make a difference. That is just not true," she said. "Often, the best thing we can do is turn down the volume."

"When the sound is quieter, you can actually hear what someone else is saying. And that can make a world of difference."

Indeed, it can. I hope Washington tries it again soon.

Readers can email Clarence Page at cpage@tribune.com.

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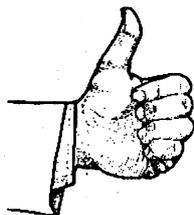
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Joe Stukes: Florence loses a good man, passionate scholar

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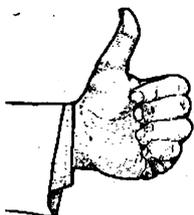
Thumbs up to colorful, sharp, charming and beloved Joe Stukes. Florence's favorite historian died Tuesday at the age of 88. Oh, the stories he could tell. Oh, the stories people would tell about him. He was a history professor and chairman of the history department at Francis Marion University from 1974



to 1990. Previously he taught at Erskine College and Lander University. As a lecturer and traveler, he led more than 70 tours to Europe. Four times a year for 20 years, through 2014, he dressed the part while delivering entertaining, captivating and insightful monologues about historical figures. The Joe Stukes History Series concluded in a room at the Drs. Bruce

& Lee Foundation Library that was named after him. "He was a treasure, not just to us in this area but throughout the country," said Rocky Gannon, a World War II veteran who went on six trips overseas with Stukes. For years, Stukes wrote a column about history for the Morning News. He made his mark as a passionate educator and a good man, and he will be missed.

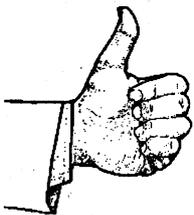
Thumbs up to S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, who delivered the Republican Party's response to President Obama's final State of the Union address. "I think she killed it," said Andrea Mitchell, NBC



News' chief foreign-affairs correspondent. Other pundits thought Haley moved up on the short list of GOP vice-presidential candidates that she already was on. She upset some fellow Republicans after she told voters to resist the temptation to follow the "siren call of the angriest voices." Donald Trump, the front-runner for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination,

is the angriest voice, and he turned his anger toward Haley on Wednesday. The divide in the party continues to grow between the so-called establishment and outsiders. Haley once was conservative enough to please tea-party supporters, but we have been pleased to watch her move away from the far right. Her leadership in taking the Confederate battle flag down in front of the S.C. Statehouse was cheered nationally but jeered by some South Carolinians. Haley will deliver her state-of-the-state address next week. We're eager to hear what she has to say.

Thumbs up to Haley again for the song she is singing about improving education in South Carolina. She said Wednesday that she wants the state to borrow up to \$200 million to renovate schools that are in "horrible condition" or build new ones. She wants the state to provide more incentives in recruiting teachers to rural areas with high teacher turnover by asking the state to pay up to \$7,500 per year in tuition for every two years that an educator teaches in a rural district where turnover has averaged 12 percent in the past five years. She also wants to expand



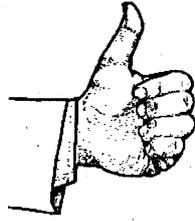
students' access to the Internet in their homes. "Education reform is a long-overdue, critical conversation that must take place to protect our state's economic and societal prosperity," House Speaker Jay Lucas, a Republican from Hartsville, said in a state-





ment. "Gov. Haley has embraced this issue, and we are encouraged by her advocacy for reforms intended to give our children access to the education they deserve."

Thumbs up to the organizers of the successful 2016 S.C. AgriBiz & Farm Expo, which was held Wednesday and Thursday at the Florence Civic Center. Kudos in particular to Jody Martin, the



event's executive director, who also oversees the Pee Dee Food Hub. This fourth annual event is a big draw for Florence, and it reinforces the fact that agriculture is big business, particularly in the Pee Dee. Farming is a challenging business. Farmers are coming off a challenging year that started with a drought, suffered through floods and ended with a very

wet fourth quarter. Fields that will need to be planted soon still are muddy. When winter starts to turn to spring, we wish farmers well.

Thumbs up to the No. 1 Clemson Tigers, who fell short of winning their second national championship in school history and their first since 1981 when they lost 45-40 Monday to No. 2



Alabama. The Tigers played their hearts out but fell victims to some big plays by the talented Crimson Tide. Clemson gained 550 yards against a vaunted defense and had 31 first downs — 13 more than Alabama. Sophomore quarterback DeShaun Watson was sensational, compiling 478 total yards. He threw for 405 yards and four touchdowns, but it wasn't quite

enough. If you had been told in advance that the Tigers would score 40 points, wouldn't you have thought sure they would have won? But the future looks bright. Watson will be back, as will running back Wayne Gallman and tight end Jordan Leggett. Wait till next year, indeed.

Thumbs up, thumbs down is a regular feature of the Morning News and appears each Saturday on our Opinion page. We seek nominations for both good and bad deeds from our readers. Send nominations to us by email at letters@florencenews.com. Be sure use the word "thumb" in the subject and include a contact number. Thumbs can also be mailed to us c/o The Morning News, 310 S. Dargan St., Florence, S.C., 29506.

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VOLUNTEERING

FEEDING FLORENCE

Project to promote harmony in community, pack 100,000 meals

BY SHAMIRA MCCRAY
 Morning News
 smccray@florencenews.com

FLORENCE

Volunteers from throughout the community will help package 100,000 meals in the Central United Methodist Church gymnasium on Jan. 23.

The Feeding Florence event is being sponsored by the Florence Faith-Based Partnership and is a partnership with Feeding Children Everywhere. The event will benefit children and adults of Florence who are in need.

"Gov. Nikki Haley has proclaimed January to be Interfaith Harmony Month. We can spend time talking about our differences or what we have in common," said the Rev. Mary Finklea, chairwoman of the Florence Faith-Based Partnership. "One thing people have in common with all faiths should be compassion for their neighbor."

Finklea said next Saturday is a chance to practice that harmony. The group is hoping to build community by building relationships.

Volunteers will work an assembly line during two shifts at Feeding Florence to package meals of lentils, white rice, dehydrated vegetables and pink Himalayan salt into plastic bags. Shifts are from 9-10 a.m. and 10:30-11:30 a.m.

"It's going to be a lot of fun but also a wonderful way to help our neighbor," said the Rev. Will Malambri, senior pastor at Central and member of the Florence Faith-Based Partnership. "There are lots of people who are hungry in our community, and this will provide them a warm, nutritious and pretty good-tasting meal."

The packaged meals will go to food banks, churches with specific ministries and organizations that help people

nate to the cause, go to www.feedingchildreneverywhere.com/?post_type=ajde_events&p=3464?ri=0&.

in need. The meals can be cooked within 30 minutes with boiling water.

Finklea said people can choose three ways to participate in Feeding Florence: through prayer, time or financial support. The Florence Faith-Based Partnership is looking to raise \$25,000 to purchase the 100,000 meals, which will cost 25 cents each.

To register to volunteer or donate to the cause, go to www.feedingchildreneverywhere.com/?post_type=ajde_events&p=3464?ri=0&.

"The primary goal is to get food to hungry people," Malambri said. "The secondary goal is that people of our community can work together for a common good."

WANT TO HELP?

To register to volunteer or do-





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Volunteers will package ingredients for lentil casserole at Feeding Florence on Jan. 23.

PHOTOS BY SHAMIRA MCCRAY/MORNING NEWS



Central United Methodist Church served lentil casserole, among other choices, to members at the Wednesday Night Fellowship Dinner on Jan. 13. Volunteers will package ingredients for lentil casserole at Feeding Florence next Saturday.

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148 Haley releases budget proposal

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Gov. Nikki Haley released a budget proposal Friday for the coming fiscal year that provides roughly \$350 million for roadwork and \$300 million on education initiatives.

Her roughly \$7.5 billion recommendation for state taxes comes in a year when there's more than \$1 billion in additional revenue available to spend. Most of the windfall stems from years of conservative estimates by the state's economic advisers and carried-over surpluses.

Roads

Haley's budget incorporates her plan for fixing South Carolina's crumbling roads and bridges.

Last year, Haley altered her opposition to a gas tax increase, agreeing to raise the tax by 10 cents over three years — to 26 cents per gallon — if legislators drastically cut income taxes over 10 years. But legislators balked at the stipulation of eliminating nearly \$9 billion of revenue over the next decade.

Haley said Friday her budget shows it can be done.

It cuts income taxes by \$131 million. According to economic advisers, her goal of cutting the top income tax bracket by 2 percentage points would reduce revenue by \$1.8 billion yearly once fully phased in.

The \$345 million her budget designates for roadwork includes \$49 million from that phased-in gas tax increase.

The DOT has said it needs an additional \$1.5 billion annually over two decades to bring the highway system to good condition, though many dispute that amount. A bill to raise roughly half that is up for debate in the Senate.

Haley repeated her threat to veto any road-funding bill that's a net tax increase.

Flood recovery

Haley's budget provides \$124 million to cover the state's share for federal assistance amid last October's catastrophic flooding.

Of that, \$49 million is the DOT's share for repairing hundreds of roads and bridges closed during the disaster.

It also includes \$10 million to reimburse

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Budget

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the state's unclaimed property fund. Haley approved transferring that amount to the Emergency Management Division in November for its share.

Haley spends \$40 million toward replenishing sand along South Carolina's entire coast. The total cost of nearly \$170 million includes \$71 million in federal spending and \$58 million paid by local governments.

"Tourism is a big part of what we do in South Carolina. Having healthy beaches for people to come back to is important," Haley said.

She also sends \$700,000 to the Department of Health and Environmental Control for additional dam inspectors. The rupture of dozens of earthen dams contributed to the flooding. Seven new inspectors would double the dam safety division's staff.

Haley's budget does not provide any relief to farmers. Legislative leaders say the state must help farmers survive direct crop losses estimated at \$376 million.

Education

Haley puts an additional \$165 million toward increasing the "base student cost" by \$80 to \$2,300.

That main funding source for schools is distributed to districts based on a 1977 formula adjusted annually for inflation. The state hasn't fully funded it since the Great Recession. Doing so would take \$520 million more than Haley's proposing.

Haley designates \$20 million toward leasing or buying new school buses. Superintendent Molly

Spearman has requested \$34 million to comply with a 15-year replacement cycle law that legislators passed in 2007, then ignored.

Haley's third-year education initiatives include \$13.5 million toward attracting and retaining teachers in impoverished districts, \$29 million to honor her three-year technology commitment, and \$11 million in targeted technology spending in poor schools and home Internet access for about 10,000 students.

"It's only good to have a tablet at school if you can take it home and use it," Haley said.

Local governments

The executive budget sends an additional \$113 million to local governments, fully funding the state's obligation for the first time since 2008.

The money, distributed by population, would boost the "local government fund" to \$325.6 million, as required under a 1991 law legislators have repeatedly suspended.

Pay raises

The only state employees receiving a raise under Haley's plan are prison officers.

Corrections pay is so low, officers are leaving to earn more in other state and local law enforcement agencies, Haley said.

The proposed \$8 million would increase officers pay by \$1,500 on average.

Her budget does provide \$19 million for school bus driver salaries, to help with hiring in poor, rural districts.

And it designates \$96 million to cover slated increases in pension contributions, so employees won't see a decrease in their take-home pay.

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Trump, Cruz go at each other in year's first GOP debate

The Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON — Republican presidential candidates Donald Trump and Ted Cruz clashed Thursday night over the Texas senator's eligibility to serve as commander in chief and the businessman's "New York values," ending months of civility between fiery contenders seeking to tap into voter anger and frustration.

Two hours of prime-time argument presented voters with a sharp contrast to the optimistic vision of America that President Barack Obama painted in his State of the Union address earlier this week. The candidates warned of dire risks to national security and challenged claims of recent economic gains for the middle class.

The heated exchanges between Trump and Cruz dominated much of the contest, with the real estate mogul saying the senator has a "big question mark" hanging over his candidacy given his birth in Canada to an American mother.

"You can't do that to the party," Trump declared.

Cruz suggested Trump was only turning on him because he's challenging Trump's lead, particularly in Iowa, which kicks off voting on Feb. 1. The senator was also on the defensive about his failure to disclose on federal election forms some \$1 million in loans from Wall Street banks during his 2012 Senate campaign, saying it was little more than a "paperwork error."

Cruz also renewed his criticism of Trump's "New York values," a coded questioning of his rival's con-

servatism. But the biting barb appeared to backfire, eliciting an unexpectedly emotional response from Trump about his hometown's response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"No place on earth could have handled that more beautifully, more humanely than New York," Trump said. "That was a very insulting statement that Ted made."

At times, the contest between some of the more mainstream candidates seeking to emerge as an alternative to Trump and Cruz was just as fiery, particularly between Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.

Rubio likened Christie's policies to President Obama's, particularly on guns, Planned Parenthood and education reform — an attack Christie declared false. Seeking to undermine Rubio's qualifications for president, Christie suggested that senators "talk and talk and talk" while governors such as himself are "held accountable for everything you do."

Still, Trump and Cruz dominated much of the debate, the first of the new year.

Cruz accused Trump of raising questions about his citizenship simply as a response to his stronger standing in the polls that Trump still frequently touts in campaign events. The senator was also on the defensive about his failed disclosure on federal election forms of some \$1 million in loans from Wall Street banks during his 2012 Senate campaign, saying it was little more than a "paperwork error."

Thursday night's debate came at the end of a week

that has highlighted anew the deep rifts in the Republican Party. South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, a rising GOP star, was widely praised by many party leaders for including a veiled criticism of Trump's angry rhetoric during her response to Obama's State of the Union address — only to be chastised by conservative commentators and others for the exact same comment.

Trump said he wasn't offended by Haley's speech and argued his anger is justified.

"I'm very angry because our country is being run horribly," he said. "And I will gladly accept the mantle of anger."

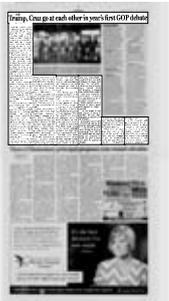
Trump also stuck with his controversial call for temporarily banning Muslims from the United States because of fear of terrorism emanating from abroad. He said he had no regrets about the proposal and noted his poll numbers rose after he announced the plan.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who has emerged as a frequent critic of Trump, urged the front-runner to reconsider the policy.

"What kind of signal does that send to the rest of the world?" said Bush, who has struggled to gain any momentum in the race and often appeared overshadowed Thursday night.

On the economy and national security, the candidates offered a sharp contrast to the optimistic portrait of the nation Obama outlined in his State of the Union address and warned that sticking with Democrats in the November election could have dire consequences.

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AP FACT CHECK

WASHINGTON — Republicans in the latest presidential debate said it's a disgrace that U.S. sailors were seen on their knees under Iranian detention. But their portrayal of the episode was not exactly on point. A look at the exchange, the facts behind it and other claims in the debate:

TED CRUZ: Any country that makes U.S. service members get on their knees like the 10 sailors whose boats were boarded and seized by the Iranian military this week "will feel the full force and fury of the United States of America."

CHRIS CHRISTIE: "Tin pot dictators ... are taking our Navy ships."

THE FACTS: Neither candidate addressed the fact that the short-lived crisis was created by the U.S. sailors who steered their boats into sovereign Iranian waters, where they were boarded and seized by Iranian naval forces. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Thursday that the U.S. sailors had made a navigation error.

Under such circumstances it would not be unusual to disarm members of a foreign military force and hold them temporarily for questioning. What was exceptional about

this episode is that the Iranians videotaped the Americans during the encounter and posted the images on the Internet. Iran returned the sailors unharmed and their boats undamaged.



JEB BUSH: "Every weapons system has been gutted."

DONALD TRUMP: "Our military is a disaster."

BEN CARSON: "We have the world's best military, even though he (President Barack Obama) has done everything he can to diminish it."

THE FACTS: These broadsides were stated in sweeping terms that reflect defense budget cuts approved by a Republican-controlled Congress and signed into law by Obama.

It's true that the defense budget has shrunk and that this has forced the military services to reduce their ranks and attempt to trim benefits paid to troops. But far from being "gutted," some key elements of the military have expanded, including the special operations forces.

Under the Obama administration the military services are undertaking a wide range of modernization efforts, including nuclear forces, combat fighter jets and missile defense systems.



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Republican presidential candidates (from left) Ohio Gov. John Kasich, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., businessman Donald Trump, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush take the stage before the Fox Business Network Republican presidential debate at the North Charleston Coliseum on Thursday in North Charleston.

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148 Senators seek raises for state employees

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A bipartisan group of senators said Thursday that all state employees should receive a 5 percent cost-of-living raise now that South Carolina's economy is rebounding.

Sen. John Courson, R-Columbia, said it's time to say 'thank you' by passing a budget that increases paychecks in July. In a year when legislators have more than \$1 billion in additional revenue to spend, employees deserve to share in the state's prosperity, he said.

Senate Minority Leader Nikki Setzler, D-West Columbia, said the take-home pay for many employees has actually declined since the Great Recession, due to rising health care premiums and deductibles as well as pension contributions.

The raises would be "recognition that state employees are the backbone of what it takes to move South Carolina forward," said Sen. Karl Allen, R-Greenville.

The proposal's \$75 million price tag would cover agencies funded by state taxes. The cost for agen-

cies and public colleges by the state's human resources office.

— such as federal taxes, fees and tuition — is unclear.

Last fall, employees making less than \$100,000 received a one-time, \$800 bonus. Otherwise, employees have received two across-the-board raises since 2008 — 3 percent in 2012 and 2 percent in 2014.

Employees haven't received a 5 percent raise across-the-board in at least two decades. The closest was 4 percent in 2005, according to the

state Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office.

But past budgets have selectively granted higher raises. In 2014, state law enforcement officers who made less than \$50,000 got a 5 percent boost. Last year's budget provided raises of up to 15 percent to Department of Social Service caseworkers to help with retention.

Also, state employees have received raises outside of the budget process.

State law allows agency directors to give pay raises at their discretion, provided that their budgets can absorb the increases. Some must be approved

by the state's human resources office.

Of the state's 59,300 full-time workers, nearly a third received such a raise last fiscal year. Of the increases that required Human Resources approval, 3,600 received raises greater than 15 percent. But the average ranged between \$2,920 and \$3,920, depending on the employees' classification, according to the Department of Administration.

Legislators have said they're concerned that such discretionary raises go primarily to higher-paid, central office staff, leaving other workers barely getting by.

The 5 percent proposal's chances are unclear.

Gov. Nikki Haley is set to release her executive budget plan Friday. None of her previous proposals have included a cost-of-living raise for all employees.

The chambers' budget writers, House Ways and Means Chairman Brian White and Senate Finance Chairman Hugh Leatherman, did not immediately return requests for comment.



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148 Republicans show mixed sentiments to response

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
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FLORENCE — South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley captured America's attention Tuesday night after she gave the Republican Party's response to President Obama's final State of the Union address.

Within minutes of her speech Haley was a trending topic online, drawing both criticism and praise from presidential candidates and political pundits alike.

She touched on immigration, the economy and partisan politics and told voters to resist the temptation to follow the "siren call of the angriest voices." She also said America would be better off if a Republican had held the presidency during Obama's

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two terms.

Several Florence Republicans say Haley did the state proud in her speech and showed the nation that she has the charisma to shine in the national spotlight.

"I think she did a great job of retelling the story of how South Carolinians responded to the tragedies we saw in 2015," said Richard Skipper, chairman of the Florence County Republican Party. "Especially the families of those killed in Charleston. She reminded folks that those are the type of people we have in our state. It spoke volumes to people in our state and around the world. It spoke to the goodness, the faith and humanity that resides in people regardless of your status, and that's something both parties can agree with."

Bill Pickle, an Internet radio host and former Florence County Republican Party chairman, said a lot of people want to place Haley in the "Republican establishment" category but her record doesn't necessarily reflect that agenda.

"I put Nikki Haley pretty much where I put myself, somewhere to the right of moderate," Pickle said. "She tries her best to work

with people, and tries her best to compromise and work together. She takes her stance and puts her foot down when she has to but I think she'd rather work with people when she can."

Not every Republican saw Haley's speech in the same light, however.

Ken Ard, host of "Good Morning Pee Dee" on 95.3 FM, said Haley has always been a talented public speaker and she represents the state well, but her speech failed to tap into the frustrations shared by many Republican voters.

"Her remarks that the Republican Party shares much of the blame in

tator Ann Coulter harshly criticized Haley's speech in a series of tweets Tuesday night. Coulter said "Trump should deport Nikki Haley" in one tweet and later slammed Haley's remarks on immigration.

Many consider Haley a rising star in the GOP, now widely considered the frontrunner for a spot as the prospective Republican nominee's vice president.

Skipper said Haley has the potential to be on the 2016 presidential ticket as the GOP nominee's running mate.

"I think the possibility is definitely there and I'd say she's probably in consideration for that role by the RNC (Republican National

Committee)," Skipper said. "I don't know how close she may be to it but I'd say she will be one of the people the RNC is looking at. I'd also say it's well-deserved."

Pickle added that he believes Haley has already been courted by several GOP candidates and there is a high likelihood that she's in consideration for the VP spot by party leaders.

On NBC's Today on Wednesday, Haley confirmed she's willing to have a conversation about running as vice president once a nominee is selected.

Washington's misgivings and the confidence people have in its ability to govern effectively and efficiently are absolutely on the mark," Ard said. "That's why I'm a bit puzzled by the comments she made speaking about the anger and frustration within the GOP electorate. The majority of voters don't wake up wishing to be angry or frustrated. There's usually something or a series of things that motivates people to become that way."

Ard said instead of questioning those who distrust Washington and are truly frustrated he suggests the powers in the GOP evaluate the disconnect from the very people who elect members of their party.

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South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley speaks Sept. 2 at the National Press Club in Washington.