

July 17, 2015

H. Leon Parker, Jr.  
406 Turkey Drive  
Georgetown, South Carolina 29440

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

I was recently told by someone who knows me well that I had been suspiciously quiet on the matter of the Confederate Flag. So while I still enjoy Freedom of Speech, and before it is taken away with all the other rights and things I hold dear, I will address the Flag issue now.

On July 9, 2015, just moments before you signed a bill into law which forced the removal of the Confederate Battle Flag from a monument on The State House grounds, you said, "Today, I am very proud to say that it is a great day in South Carolina." With all due respect, you were wrong.

First of all, I would like to state that I find it saddening that the deaths of nine people in a church in Charleston have been used to further political agendas. The day after the shooting, President Obama was calling for tougher gun control. He made the statement that things like this do not happen in other civilized countries—a statement that was refuted days later on a beach in Tunisia. Five days after the shooting, in what you referred to as "a moment of unity in our state," you were calling for the Flag to be removed. You said it is your hope "that by removing a symbol that divides us, we can move our state forward in harmony." The speed with which political agendas were attached to such a heinous act is indeed sickening.

I will not here debate whether or not the Flag stood for slavery and racism, or whether or not it was a symbol of oppression, hatred, and bigotry. It *did* not and it *was* not. But you know that.

I will not here go into whether or not the Flag killed those nine innocent people, or whether the Flag put a gun into a young punk's hand—an evil person with a twisted mentality—and forced him to enter a church and shoot those nine innocent people. It did not. But you know that, too.

I will discuss two areas in which, in my reasoned opinion, you have erred, and erred grievously.

On July 9, 2015, The House of Representatives passed a bill that the Senate had passed previously. On Facebook, you called that day "a day we can all be proud of, a day that truly brings us all together as we continue to heal, as one people and one state." While that may be what you truly believe, that is far removed from reality. By linking the Flag to a terrible incident, by calling so soon for the removal of the Flag after the Charleston shooting, and by forcing our leaders to debate the matter in the heat of a very sad moment for our state, you have driven a wedge further into the very divide that you say you want to heal.



I agree that “bringing down the Confederate flag will not . . . rid us of the hate and bigotry” that exists in this state—some divisions *are* bigger than a flag—but you have erred in thinking that bringing it down is a step toward healing. You have to look no further than social media or newspaper editorials to realize the contention you have wrought by this one act. Just wait until that contention is magnified.

Already, our state leaders are saying that the removal of other memorials, etc. will not be discussed. The mere fact that they are saying a thing will not be discussed is evidence that it is already being discussed. And make no mistake, the flag was only the first domino to fall. In time, the forces that demanded the removal of the Flag will be calling for the removal of the Confederate Soldiers’ Monument which still stands on the State House grounds. After that will come calls for the removal of any Flag or any monument on any government grounds in the state, followed by changing the names of any buildings, any roads, any bridges, and anything else that is named after any Confederate notable.

Those who wanted the Flag removed will want more. And as they are given more, they will demand still more, until all is lost. But those who hold heritage and history dear—those who sought to keep the Flag in a place of prominence—will begin to lose more and more. And as they do so, they will begin to demand a stop to the removal of the things that represent the “traditions of history, of heritage, and of ancestry.”

The murderer in Charleston said he wanted to start a race war. He failed. You said it yourself: “We were able to start [the healing] process not by talking about issues that divide us but by holding vigils, hugging our neighbors, honoring those we lost, and falling to our knees in prayer.” But, just as he was not able to start the race war he desired, neither will bringing down the Flag bring about the healing you desire. This is about more than a flag. This is about sacrificing the wishes of one party to satisfy the demands of another. When you do that, all you cause is more hatred on both sides. Just as his actions did not start a race war, neither did your actions bring about racial healing.

The other area in which I believe you have erred affects you personally—or rather, it affects your political future. Some have said that you flip-flopped on your stance concerning the Flag. You stated in a gubernatorial debate in October 2014 that you had not had a single conversation with a CEO in this state about the Flag. Some took that to mean that you were in favor of the Flag staying where it was. I see it as an experienced politician avoiding answering a question that might have damaged her reelection bid.

Personally, I believe this has been your stance all along. But as any good politician would, you patiently waited for the right moment to make your case. The shooting in Charleston gave you that opportunity, and the fact that you would tie your personal beliefs with that tragedy is, as I stated earlier, quite sickening.

It is no secret that you have political aspirations beyond the state of South Carolina. Your name has been kicked around as a possible Vice-Presidential—or even Presidential—nominee. Knowing the good you have done in this state, I would not have had a problem with you filling either of these positions. However, I truly believe you have done yourself a disservice that you may not be able to recover from. Look to history for proof of this.



In 1996, then Governor David Beasley (R) announced that he had changed his position on whether the Flag should remain on the Capital dome. He stated, "A flag should be a symbol that unites all those standing below it. One that every South Carolinian can look up to with respect and admiration." His proposal was defeated, and in 1998, he lost his reelection bid to Jim Hodges (D). The Flag, although certainly not the only reason for his defeat, was a major factor to his losing to a Democrat. It is also noteworthy that in 2007 and 2010, Beasley endorsed Mike Huckabee in the Republican presidential primaries and Henry McMaster in the South Carolina gubernatorial primaries, respectively. They both lost their bids for nomination.

David Beasley made two miscalculations with regards to removing the Flag. First, supporters of the Flag no longer supported him. He had betrayed them and they would not reward him with a second term in office. Second, opponents of the Flag are, by and large, Democrats. While Democrats of the sort we have here in this state may support a Republican from time to time—and then only when such support furthers their agenda—they will not vote to elect a Republican, no matter how much good he or she has done.

You, no matter how good your intentions or what you hoped to gain, have made the same two miscalculations. Even though people came from both sides of the aisle and from all walks of life in "a moment of unity in our state" to support your call for removal of the Flag, you have failed to consider the myriads of people from all across this state that you have not heard from. By forcing the issue, you betrayed many in this state, and by doing so, you lost a large number of supporters. You may not see these people on social media. You may not hear them at a rally. But they are there, and when the time comes, they will make their voices heard, either by voting for someone else, or by simply not voting at all. Such was the case with David Beasley.

And as far as those you sought to appease, do not be fooled into thinking that they will support you on election day. They did not support Beasley, neither will they support you. You are just the latest in a long list of Republicans who have made moves to win the left by making concessions, only to be left hanging at the ballot box.

As you make the national interview circuit of the leftist-led media, do not let yourself be misled by the notoriety you have achieved. Popularity, in this case, does not equal support. The Jacksons, Sharptons, and the NAACP crowd, the race-baiters and hate-mongers will all tout you as a hero. But for them, bringing down the Flag is just one small step in a much bigger journey, and unless you throw yourself completely in with them, they will throw you completely to the side as they move onto their next goal. They will not support your bid for President—or even Vice-President.

Of course, this could all be moot if you fail to receive your party's nomination. That is very likely, because as you said, "Some divisions are bigger than a flag." This is one of those divisions and Conservatives across this nation—not just in this state—feel that they have been betrayed by your actions. And they have been. Not because you took down a flag, but because you catered to the whims of the evil on the other side of the divide.

You called it "a day we can all be proud of, a day that truly brings us all together as we continue to heal, as one people and one state." No, it is a day that *some* in this state can be proud of, a day that a large faction outside of this state can rejoice in. But in the end, it will bring neither unity nor healing. It will only bring more pressure from



external forces to do more.

You said it was “a great day in South Carolina.” December 17, 1860 was a great day in South Carolina, for that was the day one hundred sixty-nine delegates voted *unanimously* to secede from the Union. (I emphasize the word “unanimously” because you were unable to get either our Senators or Representatives to decide *unanimously* to remove the Flag.) Those men, acting in the best interests of this state, decided it best to separate from those outside forces that threatened the state. Three days later—another great day—South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

January 9 and April 12-14, 1861 were also great days in South Carolina, for those were the days that state leaders began to drive the forces that represented the Union from South Carolina shores by firing upon the *Star of the West* and Fort Sumter, respectively.

Although the South would ultimately lose the war to a government that was more beneficial to Northern States than Southern, those days are great days in South Carolina history, because on those days, state leaders acted for the good of the state—the *entire* state—whereas your actions were only for the good of a select group of individuals.

November 2, 2010 and November 4, 2014 were both great days in South Carolina, for on those days, the people of the state elected, and then reelected, a female Indian-American as Governor of this state. You have done great things in this state and you are to be commended and applauded. The things you have accomplished have been for the good of the entire state—or, at the very least, a large majority of its citizens.

But July 9, 2015 was a sad day in South Carolina, for by removing the Flag, you betrayed a large portion of the population of this state, and dishonored the memory of those one hundred sixty-nine brave delegates who stood up in the face of external forces to do what was right for this state. What you did was a complete reversal of the actions of those men, for by giving into very similar external forces, you hurt your own people, probably in ways that you cannot even imagine. This was about far more than just a flag. It was about something bigger—much bigger—and I believe you have failed to see the big picture.

For me, whether the Flag comes down or stays up is not all that important. If the citizenry of this state had risen *en masse* and said, “Take that flag down,” or if the people of this great state had been given a voice, and had shown by voting that a majority wanted the Flag removed, I would have no problem with its removal. But that was not the case. It is true that our elected leaders in the Senate and the House of Representatives voted to approve the bill, but it is also true that they were forced, by you, into a debate that they may not have been ready for.

With your speech just days after the shooting, you linked the Flag to an incident to which it had no viable connection. Instead of focusing on the families of the victims, you linked the victims to something that had absolutely nothing to do with their deaths. By creating this phantom connection, and by forcing it upon our leaders, you drew them into a discussion that was ruled by emotion rather than reason—a discussion over something that was completely separate from the issue at hand—a discussion that never should have taken place at that time, because it had already taken place. And it had



been settled.

I will agree that there are those who despise the Flag, just as there are those who support it. That battle has been raging for decades. In 2000, during the single term of Governor Jim Hodges, a compromise was reached, and the Flag was moved from its position atop the Capital dome to a new location at the Confederate Soldiers' Monument on the State House Grounds. No longer did the Flag fly over the State of South Carolina, but rather it stood beside a memorial for soldiers who died in a terrible war—a war that stands as a vital, undeniable part of this state's history.

That compromise should have been the end of the story, but it was not. As I stated earlier, those who demand, will demand more, and that is just what has happened here. And you were instrumental in undoing what had already been done, and by doing so, you sacrificed the heritage of one party for the hatred of another. In your eyes, you think you are right, but again, and again with all due respect, you are wrong.

You, like many in this state and in this nation, feel like the Flag is a part of history and that it should stay in the past, out of sight of the present, never to be seen by the future. You recently stated that the Flag "just never should have been there." I am certain that you, like so many others, feel that the Flag was placed on the Capital dome in resistance to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Again, the Flag has been incorrectly linked to something to which it had no connection.

According to Brett Bursey, in an interview he conducted with Daniel Hollis in August 1999, "In 1959, Gov. Fritz Hollings appointed Hollis to serve on a commission to plan the state's observance of the 100th anniversary of the War Between the States. President Dwight Eisenhower had commissioned a national Civil War Centennial, and the state centennial commissions were to coordinate activities." Hollis was the last surviving member of that five-member commission.

In his interview with Hollis, Bursey writes, "Hollis remembers the day the Confederate flag was hoisted over the State House to commemorate the war. The centennial kicked off on April 11, 1961, with a re-creation of the firing on Fort Sumter. The flag went up for the opening celebrations." According to Bursey, the Flag was flown at the request of Aiken Representative John A. May, who introduced a resolution in the next legislative session to let the Flag fly for a year. Bursey wrote, "By the time the resolution passed on March 16, 1962, the flag had been flying for nearly a year. (This explains why the flag is often erroneously reported to have gone up in 1962)." According to Hollis, when the Flag went up, "it just stayed up. Nobody raised a question."

Bursey also noted two other things. He wrote, "Hollis said he doesn't recall any racist or political overtones within the commission regarding the hoisting of the flag." And, while controversy marred the opening ceremonies of the centennial in Charleston, and even though headlines in local newspapers were full of unrest on the day the flag went up, "hoisting the Confederate flag over the State House didn't generate any controversy at the time." It seems that in an effort to "move our state forward in harmony," we have taken one giant leap backward. In an effort to remove the Flag, we have created a controversy that did not exist when that same Flag went up fifty-four years ago.

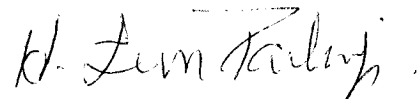
In closing I have two rhetorical questions for you. First, according to your speech

on July 9, 2015, you said, "We were recently named the friendliest state in the country." You also said, "Five years ago, it was said that in the last 50 years, South Carolina is the state that has changed the most for the better." How is that possible while we were flying that Flag, which, to you, is a symbol that divides us? How is it that, while that same Flag was flying, new businesses moved into the state, and businesses already in the state expanded? How is it that, while the Flag flew, the boycott and ban against this state by racist organizations had little economic impact? If the Confederate Flag that flew proudly on the Capital dome for thirty-nine years, and then beside the Confederate Soldiers' Monument for fifteen years, is as divisive as it is portrayed, then none of those things are even remotely possible.

Secondly, at the conclusion of that same speech, you said, "It will be fitting that our state Capitol will soon fly the flags of our country and of our state, and no others." I understand that South Carolina is still part of the United States, and that it is fitting that she should fly the flag of this nation. But if it is wrong to fly the Confederate Flag, which you called "a deeply offensive symbol of a brutally oppressive past," why is it then okay to fly the American flag? What about the eighty-plus years of brutal slavery that existed under that flag? What about Native Americans who, under that flag, were slaughtered by the untold thousands, or moved from their homes and forced to live on reservations, and who still live today in real oppression under that flag, while others only talk about living that way? What about over 127,000 United States citizens who, under that flag, were imprisoned during World War II simply because they were of Japanese descent? What about the thousands of Southern Americans who were killed on their own soil by Northern Americans flying that flag, and the Southern homes and lands that were destroyed by those same Northerners, all because somebody under that flag thought the South was wrong? If a "brutally oppressive past" makes a flag a "deeply offensive symbol," then truly the American flag should have come down a long time ago. The atrocities that were committed under the Stars and Stripes far outweighed the atrocities that were committed under the Stars and Bars, affecting more races of people, claiming more lives, and causing more destruction.

What you have done, you have done, and there can be no undoing it. I realize that. But I also realize that there has to be a stopping point. True unity will only come through mutual compromise. It will never be accomplished by the forced sacrificing of those things held dear by one side, to satisfy the hate-filled demands of the other.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. Leon Parker, Jr.", with a stylized, cursive script.

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