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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Governor Haley's Remarks
As Prepared for Delivery
Monday, June 22, 2015
The Statehouse, Columbia

This has been a very difficult time for our state.

We have stared evil in the eye and watched good, prayerful people killed in the most sacred of places.

We were hurt and broken.

We needed to heal.

We were able to start that 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.

Our state is grieving. But we are also coming together.

The outpouring of love and support from all corners and all peoples in our state and nation has been amazing.

The families who lost loved ones have been unbelievable pillars of strength and grace. Their expression of faith and forgiveness took our breath away. They truly have shown the world what South Carolina looks like at our best.

And the Mother Emanuel church re-opened its doors yesterday. Michael and I were there. We took our two little ones, Rena and Nalin.

My children saw what true faith looks like.

My children saw that true hate can never, never triumph over true love.

My children saw the heart and soul of South Carolina start to mend.

I want to talk a little about the heart of our state. I want to talk about the people of South Carolina I am so proud to serve. The country and the world have watched our strength and resilience over the last few days.

We are strong people who love God, our families and have a deep faith. We believe in neighbors helping neighbors. We are a state that has held tight to our traditions but continues to grow and change in ways that move us forward.

We were recently named the friendliest state in the country, and the most patriotic state too. American flags fly proudly from home to home across South Carolina.

In just the last few months, the nation watched our state go through another time of crisis, when we dealt with the betrayal of one of our own in the tragic shooting of Walter Scott.

South Carolina did not respond with rioting and violence, like other places have. We responded by talking to each other, putting ourselves in each other's shoes, and finding common ground in the name of moving our state forward. The result: both Republicans and Democrats, black and white, came together and passed the first body camera bill in the country.

And I stand in front of you a minority, female governor, twice elected by people of South Carolina. Behind me stands my friend, Senator Tim Scott, elected by these same people as one of just two African-American members of the United States Senate.

Five years ago, it was said that in the last fifty years, South Carolina is the state that has changed the most for the better. That was true when I quoted it at my first inauguration in 2011. It is even more true today. We have changed through the times, and we will continue to do so.

But that does not mean we forget our history.

History is often filled with emotion, and that's more true in South Carolina than in a lot of other places.

On matters of race, South Carolina has a tough history. We all know that. Many of us have seen it in our own lives, and in the lives of our parents and grandparents. We don't need reminders.

In spite of last week's tragedy, we have come a long way since those days, and have much to be proud of.

But we can always do more.

That brings me to the subject of the Confederate Flag that flies on our Statehouse grounds.

For many people in our state, the flag stands for traditions that are noble. Traditions of history, of heritage, and of ancestry. The hate-filled murderer who massacred our brothers and sisters in Charleston has a sick and twisted view of the flag. In no way does he reflect the people in our state who respect, and in many ways, revere it.

Those South Carolinians view the flag as a symbol of respect, integrity, and duty. They also see it as a memorial, a way to honor ancestors who came to the service of their state during a time of great conflict.

That is not hate. Nor is it racism.

At the same time, for many others in South Carolina, the flag is a deeply offensive symbol of a brutally oppressive past. We can have disagreements about policy, but this is a symbol. This symbol hurts people, and if it hurts just one person, that's one too many.

As a state, we can survive, and indeed we can thrive, as we have done, while still being home to both of those viewpoints. We do not need to declare a winner and a loser. We respect freedom of expression, and for those who wish to show their respect for the flag on their private property, no one will stand in your way.

But the Statehouse is different. And the events of the past week call upon all of us to look at this in a different way.

Fifteen years ago, after much contentious debate, South Carolina came together in a bipartisan way to remove the flag from atop the Capitol dome.

Today, we are here in a moment of unity in our state, without ill will, to say it is time to move the flag from

the Capitol grounds. One hundred fifty years after the end of the Civil War . . . the time has come.

There will be some in our state who see this as a sad moment. I respect that. But know this. For good and for bad, whether it is on the Statehouse grounds or in a museum, the flag will always be a part of the soil of South Carolina.

But this is a moment in which we can say that the flag, while an integral part of our past, does not represent the future of our great state.

The murderer now locked up in Charleston said he hoped his actions would start a race war. We have an opportunity to show that not only was he wrong, but that just the opposite is happening. My hope is that by removing a symbol that divides us, we can move our state forward in harmony, and we can honor the nine blessed souls who are now in Heaven.

The General Assembly wraps up their year this week. As governor, I have the authority to call them back into session under extraordinary circumstances. I have indicated to the House and Senate that if they do not take measures to ensure this necessary debate takes place this year, I will use that authority for the purpose of the legislature removing the flag from the Statehouse grounds.

That will take place in the coming weeks, after the regular session and the veto session have been completed.

There will be time for discussion and debate. But the time for action is coming soon.

I want to make two things clear.

First, this is South Carolina's Statehouse. It is South Carolina's historic moment. And this will be South Carolina's decision. To those outside of our state, the flag may be nothing more than a symbol of the worst of America's past. That is not what it is to many South Carolinians. This Statehouse belongs to all of us. Their voices will be heard, their role in this debate respected.

We have made incredible progress in South Carolina, on racial issues, yes, but in so many other ways. The 21st century belongs to us, because we have chosen to seize what is in front of us, to do what is right, and to do it together. I have every faith that this will be no different. It is what we do in South Carolina, it is who we are.

Second, I understand that what I have said here today will generate a lot of interest. What I ask is that the focus remains on the nine victims of this horrible tragedy. Their families, the Mother Emanuel Family, the AME Church family, the South Carolina family – we all deserve the time to grieve and to remember and to heal. We will take it. I ask that you respect that.

We know that bringing down the Confederate flag will not bring back the nine kind souls taken from us, nor rid us of the hate and bigotry that drove a monster through the doors of Mother Emanuel that night. Some divisions are bigger than a flag. The evil we saw last Wednesday comes from a place much deeper, much darker.

But we are not going to allow this symbol to divide us any longer. The fact that people are choosing to use it as a sign of hate is a something we cannot stand. The fact that it causes pain to so many is enough to move it from the Capitol grounds – it is, after all, a Capitol that belongs to all of us.

July Fourth is just around the corner. Soon we will once again celebrate the birth of our nation and our freedoms. It will be fitting that our state Capitol will soon fly the flags of our country and of our state, and no others.

Thank you, and God bless the great people of South Carolina.