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Cc:
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Governor Haley – congratulations on your achievement in being selected to make the Republican speech next week. The Party made a good choice.

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/06/gov-nikki-haley-just-got-a-chance-to-try-out-for-vice-president/>

Gov. Nikki Haley just got a chance to try out for vice president

By [Amber Phillips](http://www.washingtonpost.com/people/amber-phillips) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/people/amber-phillips>>
January 6 at 7:00 AM

(Richard Shiro/AP)

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley (R) had a very strong 2015. And next week -- just the second full one in this new year -- she'll have a chance to make 2016 quite a bit more interesting when it comes to her political future.

News broke Tuesday that Republican leaders in Congress chose Haley to give her party's response to President Obama's final State of the Union address, which he's delivering to Congress on Tuesday.

The prestigious invitation was the natural next step for a governor who earned national attention and applause for her handling of the aftermath of a mass shooting in her state this summer. For that, Haley [topped our list](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/30/the-5-governors-who-made-the-most-news-in-2015-ranked/?postshare=5681451482606349&tid=ss_tw) [for one of the most notable governors in 2015:](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/30/the-5-governors-who-made-the-most-news-in-2015-ranked/?postshare=5681451482606349&tid=ss_tw)

After an avowed white supremacist shot and killed nine black parishioners in a Charleston church this June, Haley handled her role as the state's griever-in-chief with grace, choking up in an emotional speech soon after, and a few months later delivering a speech in Washington calling on the GOP to be more tolerant toward minorities.

But it was the way Haley forcefully put herself at the front of the charge to end displays of the Confederate flag on public property that won her the most praise. As presidential candidates appeared to hem and haw, Haley called for the state legislature to remove the flag from statehouse grounds — something it did shortly after.

"I knew that it was giving a lot of people a pass to do what was right," she [told The Washington Post's Abby Phillip](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-nikki-haley-went-from-tea-party-star-to-representative-of-the-new-south/2015/06/28/716e5b3a-1c1e-11e5-93b7-5eddc056ad8a_story.html) [story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-nikki-haley-went-from-tea-party-star-to-representative-of-the-new-south/2015/06/28/716e5b3a-1c1e-11e5-93b7-5eddc056ad8a_story.html).

Tuesday's address is also a natural platform for Haley to try out for a job some in her party have considered her for: The GOP vice presidential nominee. For a few minutes Tuesday, she'll be a voice for her party in a speech that is likely to have major electoral overtones. She'll be drawing contrasts between Obama's -- and by extension, likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton's -- vision for America and the Republican vision, while attempting to make the case to the nation that Republicans should lead it instead.

This moment was a long time coming. Whispers of Haley's national potential began the moment in 2010 that she came from relative obscurity to win a crowded primary -- as an Indian American female state legislator who defeated three more-established white male politicians -- and eventually become South Carolina's first female and first minority governor.

On paper, Haley's background already looked like a no-brainer to be a vice presidential short-lister for a party that badly wants to make inroads with women, minorities and younger voters: She is the daughter of Indian immigrants, and at age 43, she is the youngest current governor in the U.S., despite being in her second term.

In reality, Haley had a rough first term. Even as a state lawmaker, she was never someone who got along great with members of her own party. And she struggled with [a hacking scandal](#)

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20121205/PC16/121209692/1268/haley-administration-won-8217-t-release-full-report-on-hacking&source=RSS>

that threatened millions of taxpayers' sensitive information.

But as [The Fix's Chris Cillizza wrote in June](#)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/06/22/nikki-haley-just-showed-her-tremendous-political-upside/>, all that drama "seemed a million miles away" when Haley stood in front of a diverse group of state lawmakers in the state's Capitol and called on the state legislature to take down the Confederate flag from its grounds. [They did soon after](#)
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/06/4-key-moments-from-the-south-carolina-senates-strikingly-blunt-confederate-flag-debate/>.

Haley now has an opportunity to prove to her party -- and the nation -- that this summer's Haley is the real Haley. And as with any job interview, the rewards are potentially high for a good performance, but the risks of a bad one are arguably higher.

The list of lawmakers whose stellar State of the Union responses launched their careers is much shorter than the list of lawmakers whose tepid response did their careers no favors. We're referring here, of course, to a overly thirsty Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and an awkward Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal (R).

That's often because the nature of the speech -- staring directly into the camera with no emotional indications from an audience to pick up on -- is ready-made for wooden and awkward situations.

Haley has got to tap into whatever poise and courage she summoned during the post-Charleston Confederate flag debate to help make Tuesday's speech go smoothly. The eyes of the nation will once again be on her. And if she does well, they may be for the rest of the year.

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