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Subject: Hi friends

Are y'all confirming this? Busy day for you!

Exclusive: Gov. Haley endorsing Rubio for president

The Buzz

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A blog from The State's political team of Cassie Cope, Jamie Self and Andy Shain.

Gov. Nikki Haley (left) and U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla.

BY ANDREW SHAIN

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U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio will win South Carolina's most Republican coveted endorsement of the 2016 presidential race when Gov. Nikki Haley announces her support at a Chapin rally on Wednesday evening, a source with knowledge of the governor's decision told The State.

Haley, the state's most popular GOP politician in polls, has decided to back the establishment candidate considered to be in best position to challenge Republican front-runners Donald Trump and Ted Cruz.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who has shared advice on education issues with the governor and helped her raise money for her re-election bid in 2014, also was considered a top contender to win Haley's endorsement.

But he has lagged in recent S.C. polls, falling to fifth in the six-candidate GOP field. Rubio sits third.

Haley's decision was a bit of a reversal in the past day. The governor told reporters Tuesday that she had not made up her mind on who to back in the 2016 race.

She endorsed Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential race. While the former Massachusetts

governor won the GOP nomination, he lost the S.C. primary to former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, breaking the state's three-decade streak of voting for the candidate who landed on the November ballot.

Haley has become a favorite to make vice presidential short lists after her handling of last year's Charleston shooting and successful call to remove the Confederate flag from the S.C. State House grounds. She gave the Republican response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union last month.

The governor's endorsement comes at a critical time for Rubio.

The Florida senator needs momentum in South Carolina after finishing fifth in New Hampshire after a rattled debate performance. Rubio trails Trump and Cruz in the Palmetto State with three days ahead of the S.C. GOP presidential primary on Saturday.

Haley joins U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of North Charleston, the only African-American Republican in the Senate, and U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy, a Spartanburg Republican who heads a special panel investigating the Benghazi attack, in endorsing Rubio.

Rubio has had success wooing financial support in the state.

He met major GOP donor Hank Scott, chief executive of an Allendale lumber products company, at the S.C. GOP party's annual dinner in 2012. Scott would later choose to back Rubio for president and donate a total of \$200,000 to a pro-Rubio PAC, the largest contributions tied to the presidential race from a South Carolinian.

Haley and Rubio share similar backgrounds. They are both 44-year-old children of immigrants who were elected to their current seats in the Tea Party fervor of 2010.

Rubio first met Haley when they were first running their current offices. The senator spoke at the S.C. GOP party's annual dinner in 2012, a way for him to start building relationships in early-primary state.

They have communicated while Rubio has been on the trail. The senator also has said during stops in South Carolina this week how Haley would make a good vice president.

Haley's endorsement is not without controversy.

Rubio's campaign manager, Terry Sullivan, worked for an opponent of Haley's in the 2010 Republican gubernatorial primary when rumors spread about her having an affair while a member of the S.C. House from Lexington. She has denied affair allegations.

But Haley has put aside those differences to fight what she has called the "angriest voices," especially Trump who has been the target of several criticisms from the governor about his combative campaigning.

The daughter of Indian immigrants called Trump's proposal to ban temporarily Muslims from

entering the country an embarrassment to the GOP and un-American.

Haley has not criticized Cruz, but she has not kept in regular contact with the Texas senator, who like Rubio, is the son of Cuban immigrants.

Bush pushed hard for her support. His father and brother, both former presidents who won the S.C. presidential primary, have reached to Haley in recent weeks.

But Bush is lagging in South Carolina. Bush sits in fourth in polls with several recent surveys putting him behind Ohio Gov. John Kasich into fifth.

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