

Party of Who?

BY EVA MOORE | PHOTOS BY JOHN CARLOS

Right now, South Carolina is the center of the political universe.

Liberty Tap Room in the Vista has been commandeered as the broadcast headquarters for MSNBC. Columbia-based journalists cram into elevators and cordoned-off media areas alongside reporters from CNN,

the *Wall Street Journal*. Gov. John Kasich's bus is parked on Gervais Street one day; Sen. Ted Cruz's bus is on Lincoln Street the next.

But after Saturday's GOP primary, and

the following weekend's Democratic primary — after the voting is done and the media leave and the candidates leave — the South Carolina Republican Party will be left to pick up the pieces.

And like someone waking up from a brutal bender, it'll be left flipping through its phone trying to figure what happened.

In one sense, South Carolina will likely have returned to its longstanding role as the state that chooses the GOP nominee — because all polls so far, not to mention the actual votes in New Hampshire (and

to a lesser extent, Iowa), point to Donald J. Trump winning South Carolina and going on to win the Republican nomination. From 1980 until 2012, South Carolina Republican voters picked the eventual winner of the GOP nomination every single time. Reagan. George H.W. Bush. Bob Dole. George W. Bush. John McCain. Until choosing Newt Gingrich in 2012 — when Mitt Romney ended up the eventual nominee — the state's record was perfect.

But in another sense things will have veered completely off the tracks, because South Carolina will have abandoned its role as the GOP's establishment firewall. In all likelihood, the state won't stop Trump, who's dominated polls here for months. In fact, it may well have cheered Trump all the way to the nomination.

One key reason for South Carolina's longstanding role as picker of presidents was that it was an establishment stronghold. While Iowa is full of evangelical Christians





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and New Hampshire is full of borderline libertarians, South Carolina was the land of country club Republicans — your basic genteel, powerful white guys who could be trusted to choose someone palatable to the rest of the party and the country. With a diverse mix of views spread throughout the state — social conservatives dominating in the Upstate, low-tax Republicans in the Lowcountry — South Carolina has tended to be the state where a consensus emerges.

But the rise of the tea party led to South Carolina choosing Gingrich four years ago. And this time around, similar anger seems to be fueling Trump's voters. (See sidebar, "Who Is a Trump Voter?")

"This ain't your daddy's Republican Party," says Dick Harpootlian, former chair of the South Carolina Democratic Party — not without a bit of glee. "It's not the coalition that [former Gov.] Carroll Campbell put together, or [former U.S. Sen.] Strom Thurmond put together or even [former Gov.] David Beasley put together with the evangelicals. This is just pissed-off white people."

Given all this anger and upheaval, one might expect the state party to be in crisis. And in one sense, it is: State GOP leaders are completely splintered in whom they are supporting in the presidential race. But oddly, at the South Carolina State House and elsewhere in state politics, the old power structures are more or less in place. The state Senate dithers about road funding. The governor dumps money into attracting economic development to the state.

The tension between angry anti-establishment voters and the mainstream old guard is a tension that's come to characterize the state Republican Party — and could haunt it for years to come.

Year of the Trump

"If you would have told me the leading candidate would riff through Carlin's 'words you can't say,' I would have said, 'That's impossible,'" says Trey Walker, a longtime John McCain adviser in South Carolina.

He's referring to comedian George Carlin's famous "Seven Words You Can Never Say on TV" routine — and to the fact that Trump is now openly cursing during his rallies.

"I think this Trump candidacy has changed politics, period," Walker says. "The old conventional wisdoms are nonexistent anymore. There's no more power in the third rail anymore. It's OK to touch it."

Trump rose rapidly in the polls over the past year, from somewhere south of 2 percent last spring to the top of the GOP field. First the establishment ignored him. Then they derided him. Then they got serious about defeating him, with conservative magazine *National Review* releasing an entire issue in January titled "Against Trump." South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, giving the official GOP response to President Obama's 2016 State of the Union address, sent out an anti-Trump message without mentioning

his name: "During anxious times, it can be tempting to follow the siren call of the angriest voices," Haley said. "We must resist that temptation."

And how do establishment Republicans feel now?

"I would say resigned," Walker says.

Walker probably has some direct experience with that feeling. South Carolina Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster, for whom Walker worked during McMaster's two terms as state attorney general, recently endorsed Trump.

In his endorsement, McMaster said Trump "speaks the truth in words everyone can understand, instills confidence in the people about our country's bright future, and reflects and believes in the strength and determination necessary for success." McMaster also said Trump has "quiet compassion for those in need" — a surprising description of a man who is just as often described in words like those of U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham: "a race-baiting xenophobic bigot."

Trump hasn't picked up many mainstream Republican endorsements in South Carolina. But the establishment here hasn't settled on anyone else, either. And with the primary just days away, it's too late for them to gather around a mainstream candidate in any meaningful way.

Meanwhile, the candidate in second place, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, is just as unpalatable to the GOP establishment — some even say less palatable than Trump. Party insiders have told reporters that they consider both men unlikely to win a general election. And, Vox explains, for the party's "more mercenary and pragmatic business and lobbying establishment, Trump seems like someone they could do business with, and Cruz seems like a dangerously inflexible ideologue."

Where did this outsider fuel come from? It has its roots in wars that have shaken the SCGOP over the past several years.

The Rise and Possible Fall of the Tea Party

In 2009 and 2010, a new movement rose across the nation and in South Carolina. Angry at the bailout of the big banks following the economic collapse of 2008, upset with entrenched politicians and deficit spending, a gaggle of mostly white voters went to war against both political parties. While the tea party made waves across the country, it was particularly successful in South Carolina, where it tapped into working-class frustrations and the state's longstanding anti-Washington sentiment.

In 2010, South Carolina's tea party movement buoyed Nikki Haley to the top of the primary race for governor. A State House newcomer who campaigned on ethics reform and other big fresh-air changes, she beat several establishment Republicans to win the nomination. An endorsement from Sarah Palin didn't hurt.

By the 2012 South Carolina elections, the tea party movement was in full swing — and it threatened the established Republican Par-





"This ain't your daddy's Republican Party ... This is just pissed-off white people."

— Dick Harpootlian, former chair of the South Carolina Democratic Party

ty in South Carolina most of all. Insurgent candidates had filed to run against a slew of incumbents. They talked about ethics, about cutting spending, about term limits.

But a political feat that *Free Times* dubbed Ballot Bomb saved the incumbents that year. Former Sen. Jake Knotts is credited with an effort that led to more than 200 people being kicked off ballots statewide for incorrectly filing some paperwork — including his primary opponent Katrina Shealy. Shealy got her revenge, running as a petition candidate and unseating Knotts in the general election, but most insurgents weren't so successful.

Whether it was because of Knotts' Ballot Bomb stunt, or that the tea party movement was beginning to lose steam, the GOP establishment in South Carolina survived the 2012 elections. The State House could have been remade in activists' image — but wasn't.

The U.S. Senate race two years later showed similar fault lines. Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, long a target of more right-wing activists, ran against a slew of tea party-fueled or evangelical primary opponents — six in all. Their vote was splintered, and they were a weak field to begin with. Graham demolished them.

By then, the tea party movement itself had kind of fizzled. Some activists got disillusioned, as *Free Times* has documented over the years. Others got co-opted. Only 11 percent of South Carolina Republican voters now describe themselves as members of the tea party movement, according to a December Winthrop Poll.

But according to that same poll, plenty of GOP voters are still sympathetic to the tea party: 47 percent approve of it, and just 17 percent disapprove; 36 percent aren't sure. Winthrop also found that those tea party-sympathetic voters also disproportionately support Trump and Cruz. And Trump's voters disproportionately describe themselves as "angry" and "frustrated" with the federal government.

Carson. When asked about Trump, Hanna frowned.

"I don't support him. I can't support him, with the things he says and what he stands for," Hanna says. "I have some concern."

And, despite the fact that Trump often cites a poll from last fall that indicated he could get 25 percent of the black vote in a general election against Hillary Clinton, a typical Trump voter is almost certainly white. In Trump appearances attended by *Free Times*, including a September stop at the Koger Center hosted by Sen. Tim Scott and his speech last month at a barn in Gilbert, the large audiences have been overwhelmingly white, even more so than most large GOP rallies.

Trump's audiences seem to take particular glee in the candidate's draconian take on illegal immigration and his rants against radical Islam.

While there are always exceptions, it seems unlikely that Trump will gain much traction with black voters in the Palmetto State. In fact, some African-Americans seem a bit anxious at the mere thought of a Trump presidency.

"Donald Trump is a bunch of hogwash, if you don't mind me saying," says Avalon Truesdale, a junior at Allen University who recently attended a speech by Bill Clinton at the school. "The things he says are not only ignorant, it's dangerous. Very dangerous. The fact that people could vote for that is mind-boggling in itself."

In state elections since the 2012 Ballot Bomb, the establishment has been pretty safe. Two years ago, when every member of the S.C. House was up for re-election, every single incumbent who chose to seek another term was re-elected. It seemed for a time that the forces that fueled the tea party backlash had died out.

But Trump's rise suggests the anger has never gone away.

State House Tremors

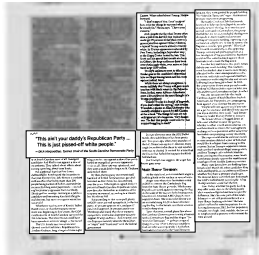
At the state level, anti-incumbent anger is bubbling back to the surface in several ways.

Anger rose when state lawmakers voted in 2015 to remove the Confederate flag from the State House grounds. While some Republicans voted against removing the flag in the wake of the racism-fueled massacre at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church, most wanted it down. The vote in the House was an overwhelming 94-20 in favor of removing the flag. In the Senate, just three senators voted to keep it up.

Later that year, a small plane flew above the Carolina-Clemson game towing a banner with a Confederate flag and the slogan "No Votes for Turncoats" — perhaps a sign of things to come. (*Free Times* was unable to find out who was responsible.) And when lawmakers returned to the State House in January, they were greeted by people holding "No Votes for Turncoats" signs. Murmurs of primary opposition are growing.

The South Carolina Club for Growth has tried to help out those Republicans who voted to remove the flag. In its most recent annual scorecards of lawmakers, the group that lobbies for tax cuts included the flag vote alongside its more traditional positions — cutting art museum funding, opposing a tax increase on cell phones. A vote to remove the flag was scored as "pro-growth." (The Club for Growth, incidentally, is also opposing Trump, running ads portraying him as a

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tax-raising fan of big government.) But there could still be some backlash against those lawmakers who took the flag down.

Another key fault line is this year's Senate debate over roads funding. The establishment has made it clear it wants more money allocated to the state's transportation infrastructure, with state and regional chambers of commerce endorsing the idea and serious lobbying forces brought to bear. In 2015, the conservative House even passed a roads funding bill that includes a gas tax hike, usually anathema to lawmakers in that chamber.

But anti-tax activists like the South Carolina chapter of Koch Brothers-backed Americans for Prosperity are campaigning hard against a tax increase for any reason.

"People will vote against you if you vote for a gas tax increase, and they'll vote against you if you don't fix their roads," said Senate Majority Leader Harvey Peeler in January.

The Senate debate is bogged down in talks over whether to raise the gas tax, whether to offset it with an income tax cut, and how much to reform the state agencies in charge of transportation at the same time lawmakers are pumping money into them.

The anger could also be seen last month

as state senators debated a pair of bills that would block refugees from coming to this country. Just as Trump's supporters nationwide are fired up about illegal immigration, and love Trump's calls to block Muslims from coming into this country, some South Carolinians deeply oppose the resettlement of refugees from Middle Eastern countries.

Many state lawmakers are holding their breath until March 30, when candidate filing ends and Republican incumbents will know whether they have a primary challenger. We may not know until then just how much the GOP establishment is in trouble. A big Trump win here could fuel the fire.

Gov. Haley, a former tea party darling, may offer some clues to the whole puzzle. She's somehow figured out how to split the difference. She's become part of the establishment — yet still positions herself as a State House-bucking reformer. She was called a sellout by some tea partiers for endorsing Romney in 2012, but her popularity remains very high. And, notably, she has yet to weigh in with a primary endorsement this time around.





Year of the Gingrich

2012 wasn't just the year the tea party almost rose up against state lawmakers. It was also the year that Newt Gingrich won the South Carolina Republican primary by 12 points, wiping the floor with Mitt Romney, who recovered and went on to claim the nomination.

Gingrich had hired at least one former tea party organizer to help with his campaign in South Carolina. And during a pair of debates leading up to the vote here, he came out firing at the media, telling CNN debate host John King, "I think the destructive, vicious, negative nature of much of the news media makes it harder to govern this country, harder to attract decent people to run for public office."

U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford recently told MSNBC that Gingrich's success here in 2012 was a sign of things to come.

"While South Carolina's been a near-perfect predictor, it hasn't been a perfect predictor" of the GOP nomination, Sanford said. "That one outlier had to do, oddly enough, with a good debate performance by Newt. It probably was a precursor, a pre-tremor if you will, to frustration with the media, frustration with the establishment."

Trump taps into that sentiment now, Sanford said: "That is all about profound frustration with the status quo."

Others have tried to do the same — Ted Cruz tore into the media during one early debate this cycle — but nobody does so as successfully as Trump, who frequently points to the media riser during his rallies and derides the assembled reporters as "absolute scum" or "morons."

Gingrich's win, according to retired Francis Marion political scientist Neal Thigpen, was "the only time the establishment hasn't controlled the thing here."

It may not be the last time.

Trump fever has even caught up with Thigpen himself. An "old establishment moderate," he says normally he'd be backing someone like Kasich. But he's considering voting for Trump.

"There's nobody else in there for me to vote for given the mood of the people out there," Thigpen says.

He disavows Trump's anti-Muslim statements — "That's absolute xenophobia and religious bigotry — but I just see it as his year," Thigpen says.

Establishment in Crisis

S.C. Rep. Chip Limehouse introduced Ohio Gov. John Kasich to a roomful of business leaders at the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce last week. Limehouse, who was described in *The Atlantic* a month earlier as "a big beefy-faced man in a suit," is retiring from the Legislature after his current term, after years spent on the budget-writing House Ways and Means Committee. He's in many ways the classic South Carolina establishment Republican — opposing abortion, sponsoring the odd bill to ban sharia law, but mostly known for directing money to big road and bridge projects in the Lowcountry.

"Why are you a Republican?" Limehouse asks rhetorically of himself. "Because it's all about business. It's always all about business."

After the introduction, Kasich gets up to speak to the Chamber crowd.

"I don't believe that economic growth is an end unto itself," Kasich says. "I believe that when we have economic growth we need to reach out to people in the shadows. The mentally ill — we can find them in jails and living under a bridge, and that's not an America I want to see. ... In our state we treat the drug addicted, instead of them being in a revolving door in and out of prison. ... The working poor, they live in emergency rooms — I've decided that's not an acceptable thing." That's why he expanded Medicaid in Ohio, he explains.

It couldn't be further from Trump's speeches, which — while they similarly promise prosperity — are full of us-and-them language.

These Chamber executives like what they hear. A vice president with the South Carolina Hospital Association nods approvingly.

There's obviously plenty of desire among Republican elites for a candidate to stop Trump. So why isn't Kasich the guy? Or Bush? Or Rubio?

It just doesn't work that way, say Republicans we spoke with for this story. They can't all just get together in a room and pick someone. People have preferences and allegiances; candidates raise and spend money and hire people in the state.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who dropped out of the presidential race before the voting began, has tried to bring together South Carolina Republicans around Jeb Bush. Many of Graham's big donors backed Bush, and Graham is touring the state with the man who wants to be the third Bush elected president.

Bush "has the ability to bring the world on board," said Graham in his endorsement.

But voters' appetite for Bush seems low — despite massive spending by his Right to Rise Super PAC, and plenty of establishment support.

Other establishments Republicans in South Carolina have picked other candidates. U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, as well as U.S. Reps. Jeff Duncan and Trey Gowdy, are backing Marco Rubio. Former attorney general Charlie Condon is backing Cruz. Rep. Mick Mulvaney backed Rand Paul, who has dropped out. As *Free Times* went to press, Gov. Nikki Haley had yet to endorse anyone. So it's tough for voters to know who has the backing of party elites.

Trumped?

When Republicans voters head to the polls Saturday, if they pick Trump as expected, they won't just be helping shape the national primary race in the weeks to come. They'll be sending a message that Trump is the direction they want to go. That it doesn't matter if you sling a few curse words and insult a few people of color, as long as you Make American Great Again.

But here in South Carolina, the conse-

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quences could be even deeper, as the Republican establishment is forced to confront the confusing, angry voices that have been bubbling up in state politics for years. It could be a wild ride. **ff**

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Donald Trump drives the crowd wild at the Florence Civic Center.

"I think this Trump candidacy has changed politics, period. The old conventional wisdoms are nonexistent anymore."

— Trey Walker



Rural S.C. Hospitals Close, More Threatened

Looking at South Carolina's rural hospitals generally isn't a pretty picture. Since 2010, four have closed. Another 10, says one expert, are seriously threatened. Just two weeks ago came word that the Williamsburg Regional Hospital in Kingstree suspended operations after fall floods made more than half of the hospital unusable. Plans call for modular buildings to be in place in just a few weeks, pending state approval, but insiders say the "temporary suspension" might just be nice talk that is a prelude to outright closure, especially if the cost for the modular units is excessive.

Rural hospitals like the one in Kingstree have been threatened for years thanks to out-migration of residents to urban and suburban areas, low tax bases to pay for costs, a large number of poor and uninsured residents, and national changes in health care that prioritize outpatient care over hospital stays.

Since 2010, some 67 rural hospitals, not including Williamsburg County's, have closed in the U.S. In South Carolina, that number includes hospitals in Marlboro and Bamberg counties, as well as Southern Palmetto Hospital in Barnwell. In January, it announced it would close after losing \$2.5 million last year.

According to Becker's Hospital Review, rural hospitals are twice as likely to close in states that did not expand Medicaid programs after passage of the Affordable Care Act. When that law passed, the state was offered \$11 billion over seven years to expand Medicaid programs to pay for health care for those living in poverty who were not children and who were younger than 65 but without affordable access to care. That translated to more than 200,000 residents.

Three years ago, the South Carolina Hospital Association warned state lawmakers that failure to expand Medicaid under Obamacare could hurt rural hospitals, which were already under threat mainly because of dwindling revenues and Medicaid reimbursement dollars.

By adding the poor to the rolls of those covered by health insurance, rural hospitals would get a vital lifeline of operating revenue, a steadier stream of money that would help them survive, SCHA officials said.

SCHA vice president Rozalynn Goodwin today says while South Carolina has missed the initial years of federal Medicaid expansion money worth billions of dollars, there's probably \$9 billion still on the table. More importantly, legislators who passively listened a couple years ago to the warnings are now actively hearing them from

constituents who are fed up that they can't qualify for Obamacare because they are too poor. (The way that the law is written, there's a "coverage gap" that keeps people in poverty from getting Obamacare unless a state expands Medicaid to cover them. As a result, they're still uninsured.)

"They're paying more attention now," Goodwin says of state lawmakers. In part, that's because states with similar values, such as Arkansas and Kentucky, were able to expand. Since they did, they're seeing big savings in state funds. For example, without Medicaid expansion, South Carolina pays 100 percent of costs of care of thousands of inmates. But with expansion, they're generally covered under Obamacare and the state only has to meet a small match. States that have expanded Medicaid to allow those in poverty to be covered also are seeing cost savings in care for pregnant woman and those who are disabled, she says.

Health economist Lynn Bailey of Columbia adds, "The Medicaid expansion money gave them [rural hospitals in other states] an operating revenue lifeline because in rural areas, they could cover their operating costs. And when you denied expansion in those areas [in South Carolina], those folks lost any hope of ever being able to generate sufficient revenues to cover their operating costs."

Rural hospitals are economic drivers of smaller areas, Bailey says. To lose them is the economic equivalent of cutting off your nose to spite your face.

"The value as an economic entity of a hospital is every bit as important as landing the new super Walmart or the automobile parts plant that's going to feed Volvo," she says. "You've got to have a health care facility and when you let the hospital close — when the horse leaves the barn, the barn is going to fall down."

Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance President and CEO Danny Black says losing a hospital, as has happened in two of his counties, is a devastating blow to a community.

"It raises fear for the elderly — that they can't get to care when needed. Same for emergencies," he says. "It hurts my job [to generate economic development] by raising concerns of existing industry, but may turn away projects looking at a community."

Bamberg County Council member Trent Kinard says most people in his area headed out of the county for inpatient care before the hospital closed. But when his community's 59-bed hospital in 2012 shut down, there was a major impact.

"It has affected our poorer population

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...has affected our poorer population that has to travel further and now they have to sit in a hospital by themselves because family can't come to visit," he says. "We took a huge hit to employment when the hospital closed."

State lawmakers could still vote to accept federal Medicaid expansion dollars, although they've missed out on at least \$2.7 billion so far. They'd also need to sway Obamacare opponent Gov. Nikki Haley to accept the funding. If legislators were to eventually take the expansion funds to cover those in poverty, the match the state

would be required to pay would be capped at 10 percent, compared to 30 percent for regular Medicaid funds.

While Goodwin says lawmakers are listening more, Kinard is more emphatic: "We must get our members of the House and Senate here in South Carolina to see the need for emergency care here in rural South Carolina. I understand that many rural areas are unable to sustain a fully operational hospital but with the closing of Bamberg — and now Barnwell — some residents will be forced to wait 30 to 45 minutes for life-saving care."

Bailey points a finger of blame at Republican Haley, who has staked out a political position to oppose federal Medicaid expansion as a way to oppose Democratic

President Barack Obama.

"Nikki Haley has, like just about every other Republican governor, abandoned rural hospitals — walked away," she says. "We could have done some policy things at the regulatory level to ease the burden on rural hospitals. But we didn't."

Some GOP governors, Goodwin pointed out, have accepted Medicaid expansion dollars. Example: Rising GOP presidential candidate John Kasich, the governor of Ohio.

"He thought it was a moral imperative," Goodwin says, adding that Ohio saw numerous state tax savings by accepting federal dollars for Obamacare.

Bailey, who says at least 10 other rural hospitals are threatened, emphasizes that state officials need to recognize that saving rural hospitals through regulatory changes and things like accepting the Medicaid expansion dollars is an economic decision as much as a health one.

"If you're willing to do a tax deal to get and maintain a manufacturing plant, you ought to be willing to do that for a hospital," Bailey says. ■

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A visit to the Statehouse

A black and white photograph showing a young girl and a woman standing in a long, brightly lit hallway with high ceilings and large windows. The girl, on the left, is holding a large sign that reads "Governor Nikki Haley ♥ Whitesides!". She is wearing a dark dress and a headband. The woman, on the right, is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a patterned dress and is smiling. The hallway has potted plants and a patterned carpet.

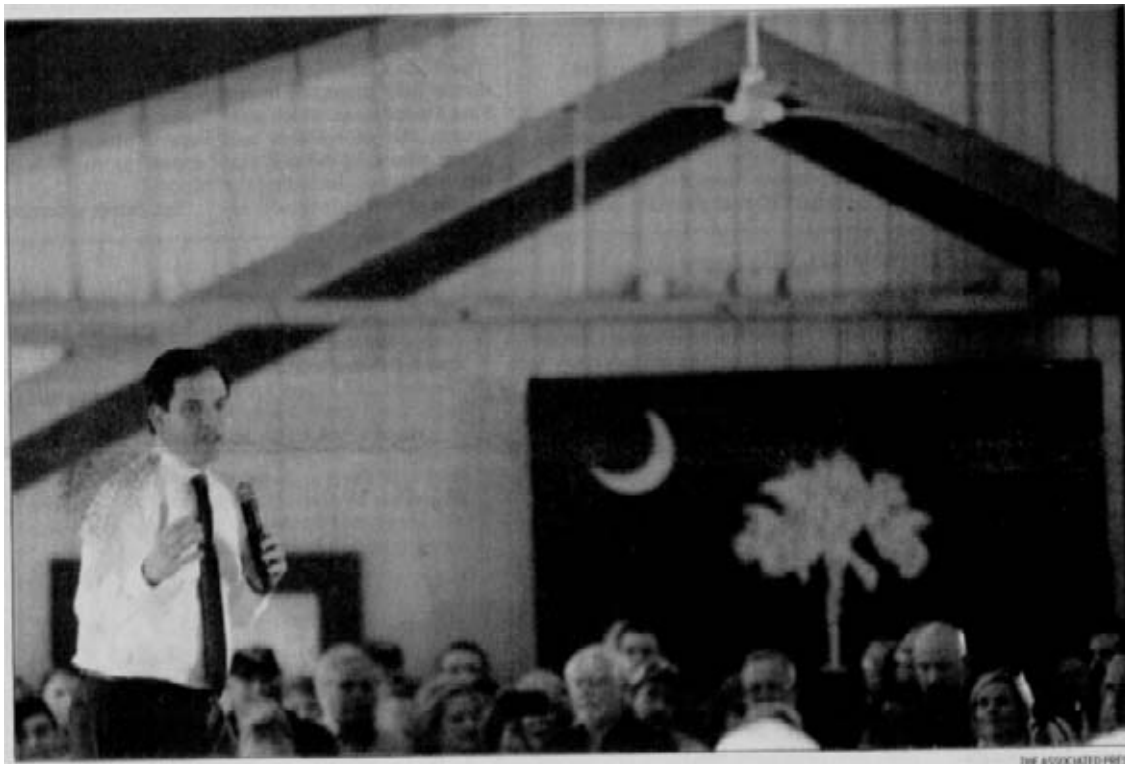
PHOTO PROVIDED

Harvey Early went to the Statehouse to see her grandfather, Judge Doyet A. "Jack" Early, be sworn in to the judicial branch. She wanted to meet the governor to tell her that her classmates want her to visit them at Whitesides Elementary School. She's a young politician in the making.

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148 Candidates jockey for gains



Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio speaks during a campaign stop this week in Summerville.

Governor Nikki Haley endorses Marco Rubio ahead of GOP primary

The Associated Press

CHARLESTON — Jeb Bush, John Kasich and Marco Rubio are locked in a high-stakes political chess match in South Carolina, strategically moving money and other campaign resources around in a bid to pull ahead in the Republican primary race — or at least keep their campaigns afloat.

Rubio got some support Wednesday with an endorsement from Gov. Nikki Haley.

The governor said she was tasked with identifying the best candidate as she surveyed the crowded GOP field.

"If we elect Marco Rubio, every day will be a great day in

America," she said alongside the Florida senator during an evening rally in suburban Columbia.

Haley's endorsement was considered the most coveted among South Carolina politicians. She joins U.S. Sen. Tim Scott and Rep. Trey Gowdy in endorsing Rubio.

The candidates' maneuvering comes as some Republican leaders fear Donald Trump or Ted Cruz will begin piling up the delegates needed to secure the nomination before one of the more traditional candidates can concentrate the support of voters turned off by the brash billionaire and fiery Texas senator. Establishment

Republicans believe either of those two could jeopardize the party's chances of winning in November's general election.

"We do need to get the field down to Trump, Cruz and somebody," said Henry Barbour, a Republican National Committee heavyweight from Mississippi. "New Hampshire tried, but it's clear as mud."

Indeed, the only thing that is clear heading into Saturday's South Carolina primary appears to be Trump's grip on the lead. Cruz, the winner of the

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Iowa caucuses, is also in the mix for a strong finish.

But the more mainstream lane populated by Bush, Kasich and Rubio is more jumbled. Bush's campaign now sees an opening to capitalize on Rubio's fifth-place finish in New Hampshire, while Kasich's strong second-place showing there has given him reason to keep going. Rubio's team, meanwhile, is quietly confident that South Carolina will prove to be a comeback story for the Florida senator.

Kasich's finish in New Hampshire has scrambled what might have been a do-or-die contest between Bush and Rubio in South Carolina. After initially viewing the first-in-the-South primary as too much of a long-shot for a moderate Midwesterner, Kasich abruptly changed his schedule to campaign in South Carolina almost every day.

The newly confident Ohio governor also recently put a small batch of ads on television in South Carolina — something he hadn't planned until after his New Hampshire success.

"Exceeding expectations is why we're here," Kasich spokesman Chris Schrimpf said.

For Kasich, exceeding expectations here would be to finish ahead of Bush, the former Florida governor. Bush has deep family ties to South Carolina — his father and brother each won two primaries here — and a poor showing Saturday could leave him without a compelling rationale to go on.

Right to Rise USA, the heavily funded super PAC backing Bush, has reduced its radio and television ad spending by nearly \$3 million across seven states that vote in the coming weeks, according to Kantar Media's Campaign Media Analysis Group data. The cuts impact some states that vote on Super Tuesday, the delegate-rich March 1 bonanza.

The super PAC made the biggest change in Texas, where it cut more than \$1 million in ads it had planned through the March 1 primary. The group also cut back in Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee and Oklahoma — all Super Tuesday states — as well as Michigan and Idaho.

Right to Rise spokesman Paul Lindsay cast the moves as a "delay" in spending that "will give us the opportunity to prioritize following South Carolina."

Rubio is also trimming his ad spending, though his cuts come in South Carolina. According to the CMAG data, Rubio's campaign has scaled back its remaining paid media in the state by more than half. However, his allied super PAC appears to be picking up the slack.

Rubio aides said the moves were aimed at bringing the campaign's ad spending down to the level of its competitors in South Carolina, not a sign of financial troubles or an indication that he was lowering expectations.

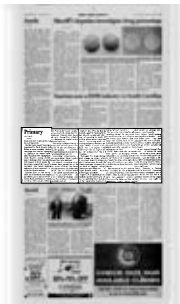
The winner in South Carolina has emerged as the nominee in each presidential cycle from 1980 to 2008. But those typically were two-candidate contests. This time the large number of candidates means there's no clean divide on ideology, personality or anything else.

Even before South Carolina votes, Republican leaders — and even some voters — say that candidates who aren't competitive need to swallow their pride and let go of their presidential ambitions.

"I'm just hoping through this election — or maybe the next one — we whittle it down a little to two or three really good candidates," said Bill Hann, a 69-year-old from Daniel Island who is still deciding between Rubio, Kasich and Bush. "Just too many voices right now."

Katon Dawson, a former South Carolina GOP chairman who remains unaligned, put it more bluntly. He said that if a candidate finishes in the single digits Saturday, "you ought to quit."

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Sen. Marco Rubio arrived in South Carolina on Wednesday after a disappointing finish in New Hampshire. The fifth-place finish was magnified by a devastating debate performance just days earlier.

Scripted Rubio chatty in S.C.



By Sean Sullivan
The Washington Post

GREER, S.C. — Marco Rubio suddenly wants to talk.

At 22,000 feet, sipping Dr. Pepper and sharing his stash of Twix bars.

In a Cracker Barrel over blueberry pancakes. At a news conference until there are no more questions.

He chats about how he couldn't bring himself to tell his sons why front-runner Donald Trump was bleeped. Or how Jeb Bush was "missing in action." Or how he emails Mitt Romney and texts Nikki Haley.

And more. A lot more.

Long guarded by aides vigilantly limiting his exposure, Rubio has abruptly morphed into a freewheeling raconteur in front of a press pack that he has kept at a distance since launching his presidential run last April.

The Florida senator says he always planned to open up this way as the nomination battle moved beyond the more intimate early states, where his time was dominated by meeting voters one-on-one. But the shift feels more like a prescription for healing the deep wounds left by his devastating showing at last week's GOP debate, where he was mocked for being too scripted and robotic after repeating the same phrase four times.

That image not only derailed Rubio's bid for success in New Hampshire, it threatens to sink his entire campaign if he does not recover in the South Carolina primary Saturday. It's hard to win as an unflattering caricature drawn by your opponents, so Rubio is sketching over it.

Here in South Carolina, he invited a small group of reporters to interview him on board his chartered jet en route to the Greenville area on Thursday. Earlier, he and his wife Jeanette answered questions over breakfast at Cracker Barrel in Okatie from a larger group of journalists. The previous day, he held forth for 45 minutes with reporters until there were no further questions.

It was a dramatic departure for Rubio, whose news conferences in the past were usually more formal affairs. In his hour-long charter flight interview, Rubio dove into topics that he and his aides are usually reluctant to discuss on the record: strategy and process.

"Now we're getting into bigger states. We'll have half a million voters in South Carolina. I can shake a lot of hands, but I can't shake that many," Rubio said. "So we're going to have to reach people through earned media a little bit more, which means we're going to have to kind of shift our dynamic in that direction."

Rubio sized up his opponents. "I still think there's a significant number of people in our party that will never support him," he said of Trump. He later added: "Trump is not ideological. Trump is attitudinal. It's populism."

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz's enthusiastic base gives him a "floor" of support, but "the question is how high is his ceiling?" asked Rubio.

Bush's problem, in Rubio's view: "On the major issues facing the conservative movement over the last seven years, you know, he's been basically missing in action."

Haley, South Carolina's governor, has not made an endorsement in the race. Rubio said that he would "love" to have her support and that he keeps in touch with her mostly through texting.

Rubio also stays in touch with Romney, the 2012 Republican nominee. "He likes to email," he said. The candidate said he peruses The New York Times, The Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal on his iPad. However, he watches "very little cable news."

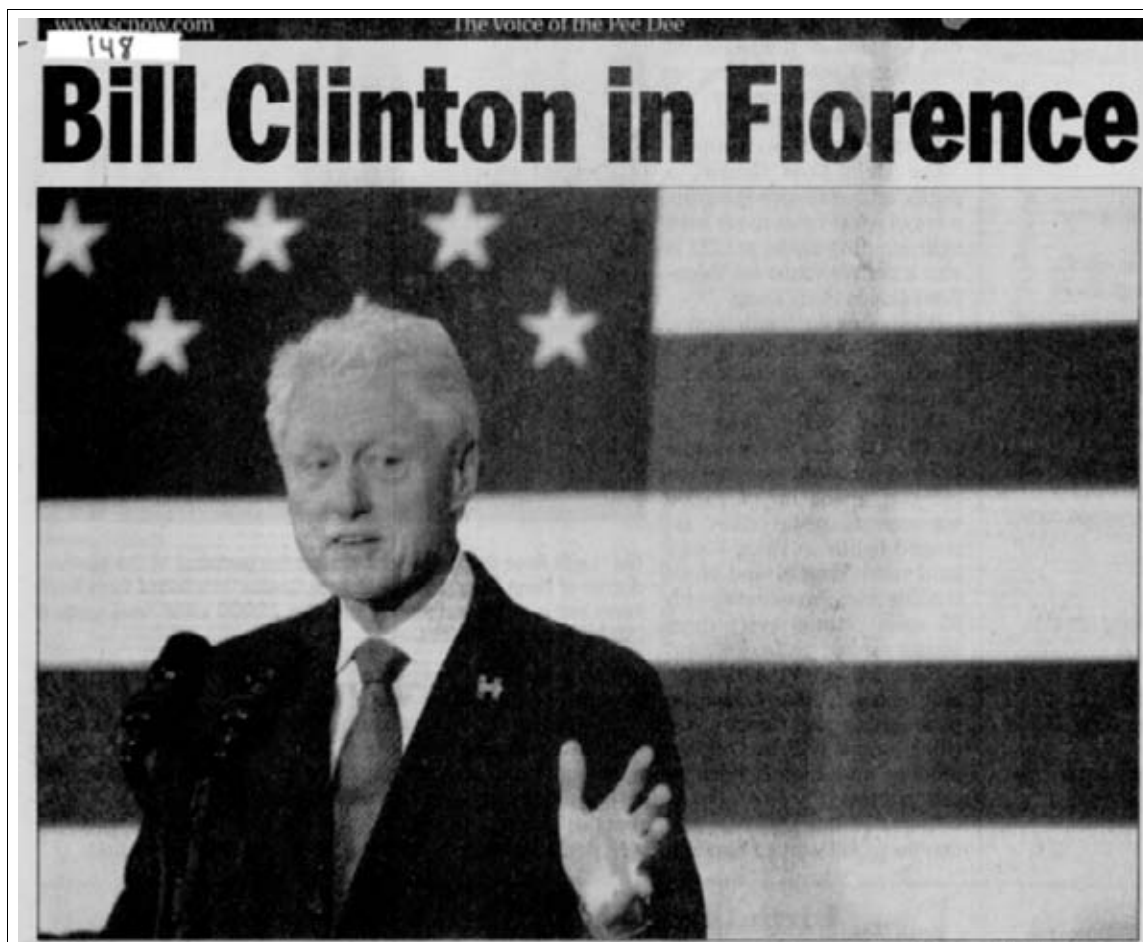
"I just don't have the time," he said.

A big football fan and former college player, Rubio this week likened his disastrous debate to getting beat as a defensive back who has to quickly regroup before the next play. He also drew broader parallels between the campaign and athletic competition, at times sounding like a coach giving himself a pep talk.

"I don't think you can have highs if you don't have lows," he said.

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Former president Bill Clinton speaks on the Francis Marion University campus on Saturday night.

Former president touts wife's record, bipartisan work

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
 Morning News
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FLORENCE — At a Hillary Clinton campaign event in Florence on Saturday night, former Democratic President Bill Clinton said his wife's record shows that she's willing to work with Republicans on tough issues make real progress.

About 650 people gathered in the commons area of the Smith Uni-

versity Center at Francis Marion University for the "Fighting for Us Rally," to listen to Bill Clinton's stump

speech for Hillary.

"The reason Hillary should be president is not just because she's been secretary of state, and a senator, and a first lady, and knows more about domestic and foreign policy than anybody you could possibly vote for," he said. "The real reason is in a

troubled time you need a world-class change maker, someone who can figure out how to make the best out of every situation."

He said his Hillary has a proven record of reaching across party lines for progress, giving examples of her work with Republican leaders such as U.S. Senators Lindsey Graham and John McCain on veteran's af-

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Former president Bill Clinton waves to the audience as he makes his way to the stage at the Smith University Center on the Francis Marion University campus on Saturday night.



MEGAN MAY / MORNING NEWS

Hundreds of people turned out to watch Bill Clinton speak at Francis Marion University on Saturday.





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Clinton

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fairs and other Republican leaders after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Clinton also praised South Carolina politicians and Republican Gov. Nikki Haley for the swift removal of the Confederate flag from statehouse grounds after the murder of nine black parishioners in Charleston.

"South Carolina, after that horrible tragedy, gave the country an incredible gift," Clinton said. "We got to watch democracy come alive again."

In light of the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Clinton said America needs a president who will nominate justices who will move the nation forward.

"We've got to elect a president who will say 'I want to put people on the Supreme Court who will expand voting rights, not shrink it,' " he said. "Basically, I want to put people on the Supreme Court who read the Constitution in a way that allows us all to be treated equally under the law and we can move forward together."

During the rally, Clinton halted and called for a doctor after a supporter near the stage apparently fainted. She quickly regained consciousness and Clinton took that chance make the situation a talk-

ing point.

"Give her a hand. That's a metaphor for my mes-

sage about the economy," he said. "Even when you're down, as long as you can get back up you've got a shot."

Supporters

Hundreds of people filed into the commons not only to hear a former president but also to show their support for his wife. Some of the supporters said Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders doesn't have what it takes to grasp the Democratic nomination.

Retired Army Sgt. Maj. Rick Walden said he sees Hillary Clinton as the most aggressive candidate when it comes to veterans' affairs.

"I like that she's aggressive when it comes to veterans and the elderly," Walden said. "I was a VA officer for several years so I understand the needs of our veterans. She and her husband represent that population very well."

He said other candidates, Democrat and Republicans alike, are talking about veterans' issues but Clinton is pushing harder.

"I just don't see the push in the other candidates that I see in Hillary," Walden said. "I think with their experience, they can make some real changes. I think it will be close between her and Bernie Sanders but she has that

experience."

Chad McCorkle, a student at Francis Marion University, said he's voting for Hillary Clinton because he wants a president with proven experience. He said Sanders doesn't have the lasting power to do the job

"If I can be blunt, Bernie Sanders is just too old," McCorkle said. "If he did get elected, I don't think he'd have a long term. I want someone who will be there for the next four or eight years, and make the changes we need."

McCorkle said he feels that Hillary Clinton is the only candidate who will accurately represent college students, minorities and the lower-class.

Cassondra Williams, also a student at Francis Marion, held the same sentiments and said she'd ultimately like to see America put a woman in the Oval Office.

"She has strong policies and I really like where she stand with students and the black community," she said. "Plus, she's a strong woman. It's time for us to put a woman in the White House."

Tony Presley, a Murrells Inlet resident, was seen sporting a red hat from Hillary's 2008 campaign. He said she's the only candidate with the knowledge to handle the vast array of problems facing the nation.

"She's not a one-trick pony like most of these other candidates on either side. I'm talking about Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders," he said. "She understands all the issues and she can talk about them in depth. No matter what you ask Sanders, his answer is always 'Wall Street' or 'campaign financing.' It's the same with Trump and building a wall."





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House approves idea of appointing state schools chief

COLUMBIA — The governor could appoint South Carolina's top educator under legislation approved by the House.

The measure sent to the Senate on Thursday would ask voters whether the state superintendent should continue to be elected or chosen by the governor.

Gov. Nikki Haley is push-

ing for the change. She says it's critical that the governor and superintendent work together on a shared education agenda. Haley says she works with first-term Superintendent Molly Spearman as a team, but that hasn't been the case with previous officeholders.

If voters approve the constitutional amendment, the last election for superintendent would be in 2018.

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GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES VISIT FLORENCE
Kasich promotes positivity

Calls for balancing the budget, positive campaigning during rally

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
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FLORENCE — GOP presidential candidate and Ohio Gov. John Kasich told hun-

dreds gathered for a meeting in Florence on Thursday that

he's banking on a surge in the South Carolina primary

Feb. 20.

After a second-place finish in the New Hampshire primaries, he asked the crowd in Francis Marion University's

Chapman Auditorium to give him a "chance to take it to America."

"I asked New Hampshire to give me chance. Now I'm in

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Kasich

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South Carolina asking you and I'm having the time of my life," Kasich said. "I'm going to be positive and if I can't win by being positive, then I'm going home with my head high."

He said he has high hopes for the South Carolina GOP primary and will be campaigning heavily in the Palmetto State during the next week.

"Our venues are too small to accommodate all the people showing up, so we're pleased with what we're seeing at this point," Kasich said.

The Ohio governor said balancing the national budget and ridding taxpayers of the \$19 trillion debt is the catalyst that will get America's middle class out of disrepair.

"We've got to get jobs going, period. The president's economic policy has been very poor," Kasich said. "What we've got to do is get regulations under control, cut taxes for both businesses and individuals and get on the road to balancing the budget. What that's going to do is get us in a position where we can have economic growth for



Presidential candidate John Kasich speaks to a crowd during his town-hall meeting at the Chapman Auditorium on the Francis Marion University campus.

everybody, particularly the middle class."

Kasich answered audience questions on a variety of topics including the repeal of "Obamacare," strengthening Social Security and lowering the cost of college tuition.

"Let's shed the assets we don't need, let's focus on the things we're supposed to do and let's get rid of the cost drivers," Kasich said. "At the same time we've got to have robust job training and make sure our kids graduate from high school and community college with skills that are necessary in the 21st century."

During a post-event interview with the Morning News, Kasich said he admires South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who gained national attention as a po-

tential running mate.

"I think she's great, but I think it's a little early for me to be thinking about a vice president," he said. "She's absolutely one of the most qualified, so I think she's definitely going to be considered by whoever gets the nomination. They'd be crazy not to."

Some voters who turned out for the event said they aren't completely sold on a Kasich presidency but that he's definitely a contender with the experience necessary to do the job.

"I want someone who knows how to lead and isn't going to divide us further. Gov. Kasich has good experience and a positive message," said Linda Dowling, a Florence resident. "Right now it's a tossup."



Presidential candidate John Kasich speaks to a crowd during his town-hall meeting at the Chapman Auditorium on the Francis Marion University campus.

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