

# Gov. Nikki Haley: The GOP Needs to Recommit Itself to Conservatism

During a speech Friday at the Federalist Society's National Lawyers Convention, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, widely considered a top candidate for several positions in President-elect Donald Trump's new Cabinet, spoke about the recent general election and what it means for America.

Hyperbole, she said, has become all too common in politics, and that while she tries to stay away from using it herself, she is compelled to acknowledge that our nation is now in the midst of "the most interesting time" in American political history. As she attempted to break down the historic 2016 election, she returned frequently to her overriding theme: the need for honesty.

With that in mind, she addressed the need for the Republican Party establishment to come to terms with its own failings:

"This election brought with it things we never thought we would see. There is no need to run through all of them here, other than to say that there are important lessons ... both in the primary, Democrat and Republican, and in the general election. Lessons we must acknowledge honestly, and problems we must fix.

"The after-the-fact dissection of presidential candidate almost always focuses on the losing side; that is understandable. But if we, as Republicans, are going to lead effectively and have staying power as a governing party, we must accept that Donald Trump's election was not an affirmation of the way Republicans have conducted themselves.

"The president-elect deserves tremendous credit for the way he

was able to connect with the electorate, but he did not do it by celebrating the Republican Party. The American people did not vote for him because he had an 'R' next to his name. He ran against both parties, against the political system at-large—a system he argued was fundamentally broken, an argument that the voters subscribed to in massive numbers.

“They rejected the political class of all stripes, Republicans included. We had no one to blame but ourselves. There have been broken promises at every level of government. We need to go back to the basics and remember that we are the party of limited government, the party committed to creating opportunities for all people, that party of inclusivity. We pulled away from that over the past decade.

“We saw a Republican Congress that kept levels of spending completely out of control. We saw Republican-elected officials move to expand Medicaid instead of working to find real solutions to our health care problems. We saw Republicans start to move toward big government instead of away from it with things like Common Core. Republicans lost our way.

“We were told that if we elected a Republican House and a Republican Senate, everything would change, yet we never saw action. Spending continued to climb, health insurance premiums continue to go up, the federal government continued to make it harder to do business in America. We expected stacks of bills to be put on President Obama’s desk so the public could truly understand where he wanted to take the country, and where we did. That never happened.

“Instead, Republicans ignored the growing anger and frustrations that were building among the American people. They were watching their paychecks shrink, their student loans grow, their daily lives become more difficult, and all they saw in Washington, D.C., was Republicans continuing to blame Democrats.”

Haley then quoted herself from her response to President Obama's last State of the Union Address in which she said that while Democrats in Washington bear much of the responsibility for the problems facing the U.S., they did not bear it alone. At that time, she said Republicans need to "recognize our contributions to the erosion of the public trust in America's elected leadership; we need to accept that we played a role in how and why our government is broken, and then we need to fix it."

Now, with a "unified" Republican government in Washington, 34 GOP governors, and more Republican-controlled state legislatures than at any other time in American history, it is an "exciting time" to accomplish exactly what she spelled out 10 months ago. She said it was a time to "look in the mirror, remember who we are, and what we believe in."

"The opportunity is there," she said. "We now have a chance to work on meaningful solutions to change the way we communicate, to remind people that the GOP is the party that will deliver freedom and possibility to all citizens, regardless of their race, gender, or where they were born and raised. That, after all, is what makes the Republican Party and what drew my parents to America."

In closing, Haley said that while the nation had just been through "an election as contentious as any most can remember," and that the nation is deeply divided, she remains optimistic. She said the lesson she takes from her time in office in South Carolina is that through our challenges, Americans will find their strength.

"It is my hope that our new unified government embraces our challenges and finds our strength," she said. "For if we do—if we listen to the will of the people, if we learn from the mistakes of the past, embrace the opportunities of the future, and govern with honesty and integrity—there is no limit to where the Republican government can take our nation."