

# [***Nikki Haley exits Republican presidential race***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGP-DNK1-DY7V-G22W-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Kylie Atwood, Arit John and Ebony Davis, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former South Carolina Gov. [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/28/us/nikki-haley-fast-facts/index.html) announced Wednesday that she is exiting the Republican presidential race and urged presumptive nominee [*Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45) to "earn" the support of voters who backed her.

"The time has now come to suspend my campaign. I said I wanted Americans to have their voices heard. I have done that. I have no regrets," Haley said during remarks in Charleston, South Carolina, following a [*series of losses in GOP nominating contests*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/06/politics/takeaways-super-tuesday/index.html) on Super Tuesday.

Haley congratulated Trump in her address but did not endorse him.

"I have always been a conservative Republican and always supported the Republican nominee, but on this question, as she did on so many others, Margaret Thatcher provided some good advice when she said, 'Never just follow the crowd. Always make up your own mind,'" the former governor said.

"It is now up to Donald Trump to earn the vote - those in our party and beyond it, who did not support him. And I hope he does that," she said. Sources familiar with her plans told CNN prior to her speech that Haley's approach appears to leave room for her to endorse Trump ahead of the general election.

Haley, who was Trump's US ambassador to the United Nations, also used the speech to swipe at the former president's isolationist foreign policy views, saying, "Our world is on fire because of America's retreat."

"Standing by our allies in Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan is a moral imperative. But it's also more than that. If we retreat further, there will be more war, not less," she said.

Haley was the last of a dozen major candidates whom Trump vanquished in a GOP primary that he dominated from start to finish - including [*winning 14 of the 15 GOP contests on Tuesday*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/super-tuesday-primary-03-05-24/index.html) - even as he skipped the party's debates and maintained a much lighter schedule of early-state travel than all of his rivals.

Haley had vowed to stay in the race through at least Super Tuesday. She had also begun [*sharpening her attacks*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/nikki-haley-older-voters-south-carolina/index.html) on Trump, questioning his mental fitness and lumping him together with [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden), the likely Democratic nominee, as one of two "grumpy old men."

But her home state of South Carolina served as her fourth straight loss in 2024 - including one to "[*none of these candidates*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/politics/nevada-primaries-biden-trump-haley/index.html)" in the Nevada primary, where Trump wasn't competing and there were no delegates at stake. (He opted to participate instead in the party-run caucuses, which awarded delegates.)

Haley had little hope of keeping pace with the former president with the race shifting into a new gear, moving from early-state contests in which retail ***politics*** take center stage to a national race with 56% of the party's delegates due to be awarded by March 12 - most of them in winner-take-all contests.

Still, in her campaign, Haley became the first Republican woman to win two primary contests: Vermont and the District of Columbia. The wins prevented Trump from being able to say that he shut out Haley in every state, but the victories were not enough to award her with a significant delegate count.

An uphill battle

The former South Carolina governor's exit demonstrated how little Republican voters were swayed by arguments about electability - with the party's base remaining loyal to Trump, who has falsely claimed he lost the 2020 election due to widespread fraud, despite general election polls showing that Haley was in much stronger position against Biden.

"We have a great Republican Party with tremendous talent, and we want to have unity and we're going to have unity and it's going to happen very quickly," Trump said at a Super Tuesday election night watch party at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

After Trump won more than 50% of the vote in Iowa, where Haley placed a distant third, members of the Republican Party quickly consolidated around the former president and endorsed him. Former 2024 candidates, including biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, campaigned with Trump on the eve of the New Hampshire primary. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also took a parting shot at Haley as he exited the field, calling her platform "a repackaged form of warmed-over corporatism."

There was not a similar rush of support behind Haley. Though former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson endorsed her, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie did not, and was caught on a hot mic saying she would get "smoked."

In New Hampshire, a state her ally Gov. Chris Sununu once predicted she'd win in a "landslide" before polls showed Trump pulling ahead, Haley failed to defy expectations and lost by 11 points.

On Super Tuesday, even as Haley's team saw a victory in Vermont and a strong showing in the Virginia suburbs, "the benchmark for staying in the race was not reached," an adviser told CNN. Going into the biggest day of voting, the adviser said, the team had set a loose threshold of winning about 40% of the vote in several states to credibly stay in the race.

"Nikki Haley got TROUNCED last night, in record setting fashion," Trump said on social media Wednesday, before urging her supporters to join what he termed "the greatest movement in the history of our Nation."

On the campaign trail, Haley often tried to distinguish herself from Trump as the better alternative to reel in moderate and independent voters in a general election against Biden.

"I win moderates and independents which he [Trump] doesn't. That's why he lost in 2018. That's why he lost 2020. That's why he lost 2022 and that's why in every poll you see he loses to Joe Biden, and I win," Haley said during an interview with Fox News.

Though she signed a pledge committing to support the eventual GOP nominee as part of a requirement to participate in GOP primary debates last year, Haley had in recent days suggested she was [*no longer bound by that commitment*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/haley-trump-republican-pledge/index.html), saying that she would "make the decision I want to make."

An upstart campaign

Haley entered the GOP presidential race in February of last year, becoming the first person after Trump to launch a 2024 bid. She polled in the low single digits for much of the first six months of her campaign, but gained momentum after the first GOP primary debate in August, where she called for a "consensus" on abortion and stood out for her foreign policy experience. She was well received in subsequent debates, which helped fuel interest from voters and donors.

By late fall, many wealthy Republicans - and some Democrats - looking for an alternative to Trump started rallying behind Haley. She received the endorsement of billionaire Charles Koch's political network in November and her campaign announced it raised $24 million in the last quarter of the year. She was also endorsed by Sununu, bolstering her campaign in one of her most promising states, where 40% of registered voters identify as independent.

That momentum drew the attention of her rivals, who started digging into her record and attempted to paint her as a candidate beholden to her donors. DeSantis and his allies attempted to undercut her tough stance on China by highlighting her work wooing Chinese companies to South Carolina. Haley responded that governors across the country were recruiting Chinese business at the time but that the US now has a better understanding of its relationship with China.

Some of the wounds were self-inflicted. In mid-November, Haley called for name verification of social media accounts, which would have virtually eliminated anonymous posting. She quickly retreated after a wave of backlash. Ahead of the Iowa caucuses, DeSantis latched on to a comment she made joking that Iowa starts the nominating process and New Hampshire "corrects" the results.

Her biggest stumble came at the end of 2023, when she was asked about the cause of the Civil War during an event in New Hampshire. Haley failed to mention slavery in her response, which prompted a wave of criticism from Democrats and Republicans. In the days that followed, she said that she was wrong to leave out slavery and highlighted her own experiences with racism as the daughter of Indian immigrants who grew up in rural South Carolina.

Her views on race were highlighted again in January, when she told a Fox News host that the US has "never been a racist country" despite its history with legal discrimination. Haley argued that while she had experienced racism in her life, she believed the country wasn't founded with the intent to perpetuate racism.

But Haley, known for saying she "kick[s] back harder," also went after her rivals. She frequently blasted Ramaswamy over his foreign policy stances, accused DeSantis of "lying" about her record "because he's losing" and said Trump was throwing "temper tantrums" because she was gaining on him.

After her third-place finish in Iowa, Haley declared the nominating contest a two-person race between herself and Trump, a prediction that came true after DeSantis ended his campaign days before the Granite State primary.

The race grew personal between Trump and Haley. The former president elevated a post that falsely claimed Haley wasn't eligible to be president because her parents weren't citizens when she was born in South Carolina, echoing the birther smears he had once leveled against former President Barack Obama. Trump also took to misspelling her first name, Nimarata - Nikki is the former governor's middle name - and mocking her.

Haley, meanwhile, questioned Trump's mental competency after the former president confused her with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during a campaign rally.

"The reality is he was confused," she said during a January 21 campaign event. "He was confused the same way he said Joe Biden was going to start World War II."

Haley's critiques of Trump grew even sharper after he mocked her husband's military service and called for all of her donors to be "permanently barred from the MAGA camp."

"In that moment, he showed that with that kind of disrespect for the military, he's not qualified to be the president of the United States, because I don't trust him to protect them," Haley said in mid-February.

A longtime GOP rising star

Haley's political career started in 2004, when she beat a 30-year incumbent in a GOP primary for a state House seat in Lexington County, South Carolina. During her 2010 gubernatorial bid, she beat a congressman, the state attorney general and the lieutenant governor in a crowded Republican primary and narrowly beat her Democratic opponent in the general election.

At the time, Haley was seen as a rising GOP star and potential vice presidential pick in 2012 and 2016. She was selected to give the GOP response in 2016 to President Barack Obama's final State of the Union address.

On the presidential campaign trail, Haley highlighted her work in South Carolina bringing jobs to the state and enacting conservative policies such as voter ID and abortion restrictions.

One of the defining moments of Haley's governorship came in 2015, when a White supremacist gunman killed nine Black churchgoers at Charleston's Mother Emanuel AME church. After years of calling the Confederate flag a sensitive issue, Haley called for the flag to be removed from the statehouse grounds days after the killings.

Haley spent six years as governor of South Carolina before becoming Trump's ambassador to the United Nations in 2017. As a presidential candidate, she spoke often of the two years she spent at the UN and the perspective it gave her on threats facing the US.

Her calculated departure from the Trump administration after two years on the job, raised speculation about what was next for her. She spent nearly a year on the board of Boeing, a company she worked with extensively in her South Carolina days, but resigned in March 2020 after executives discussed seeking Covid-19 relief funding.

In the wake of the [*January 6, 2021*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/january-6-insurrection), attack on the US Capitol, Haley said she believed her old boss had no future in ***politics*** and would not run for president in 2024.

"I don't think he's going to be in the picture," she told Politico in February 2021. "I don't think he can. He's fallen so far."

But two months later, she said that if he did run, she would support his campaign and not run against him.

"That's something that we'll have a conversation about at some point, if that decision is something that has to be made," she told The Associated Press.

When Haley became the first candidate to challenge him after his late 2022 announcement, Trump told reporters he had encouraged her to run.

"Even though Nikki Haley said, 'I would never run against my President, he was a great President, the best President in my lifetime,' I told her she should follow her heart and do what she wants to do," Trump said in a statement after she announced. "I wish her luck!"

This story and headline have been updated with additional information.

CNN's Jeff Zeleny, Eric Bradner, Alayna Treene and Kate Sullivan contributed to this report.

By Kylie Atwood, Arit John and Ebony Davis, CNN

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