

# [***Tim Scott takes center stage in Trump-Haley battle as South Carolina primary approaches***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BD4-XYB1-DY7V-G059-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45)'s campaign released this week a new ad attacking former South Carolina Gov. [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/20/politics/nikki-haley-2024-campaign/index.html) ahead of Saturday's South Carolina GOP primary. But instead of featuring Trump's voice, it highlighted attacks against Haley levied by Sen. [*Tim Scott*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/politics/tim-scott-endorsement-trump/index.html).

The ad, which featured [*Trump's most prominent surrogate in the state*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/politics/tim-scott-endorsement-trump/index.html) outlining Haley's proposal to increase the gas tax as governor, illustrated the fallout between two South Carolina Republicans with a rich history that started amicably but turned increasingly bitter over the course of the 2024 presidential campaign.

While Haley faces steep odds to overtake Trump for the Republican nomination, Scott's decision to endorse Trump in January has thrust him back into the spotlight after suspending his own presidential campaign last year, and he's recently been floated as a possible vice-presidential nominee alongside Trump. A CBS News poll of South Carolina Republicans released earlier this month showed Trump leading Haley by 35 points.

Scott on Thursday said that Haley stepping aside would be for "the good of the country."

"The one person that stands in the way of having a conversation between Joe Biden and Donald Trump is Nikki Haley, and so getting out of the way is incredibly important, not for the party but for America's future," Scott said in response to a question from CNN's Jeff Zeleny.

Scott will join Trump at his rally on Friday in Rock Hill and will then fly with the former president to the Black Conservative Federation gala in Columbia, according to a spokesman for the senator.

Scott and Haley began their relationship under favorable circumstances. Haley, who served as South Carolina governor from 2011 to 2017, elevated Scott from his House seat to the US Senate in 2012 to fill a vacancy left by Sen. Jim DeMint's retirement. Scott was in the middle of his first term in Congress when Haley appointed him to the Senate. He'd previously spent most of his political career serving on the Charleston County Council. At the time of his appointment, Haley said Scott "earned the seat" from his personality and his record.

After both Haley and Scott jumped into the presidential race last year, they refrained from directly attacking each other even as they courted the same GOP voters and donors. Scott in particular made a point of not criticizing any of his rivals and instead projected an optimistic, positive image he hoped would charm the electorate.

But when polls showed Haley rising in the field following heated exchanges with other candidates, Scott used the second Republican debate to take a more aggressive posture, and circled Haley as one of his targets. In addition to criticizing Haley over her proposed increased gas tax, Scott attacked her for approving a $50,000 purchase on curtains during her time as UN ambassador. Haley said the curtains were approved during the Obama administration.

While the attacks on Haley helped Scott deliver what was seen as among his strongest moments of his campaign, it did little to improve his standing with voters, and he ultimately dropped out of the race in November.

In January, with the field narrowed to just Haley and Trump, both candidates sought Scott's endorsement as they looked to consolidate as much Republican support as possible. Scott announced his endorsement for Trump at a campaign rally in New Hampshire days before the state's primary, a pivotal contest where Haley staked her campaign on delivering a strong performance. While Scott said he informed Haley he was planning to endorse Trump, she told CNN she learned of Scott's endorsement when it was reported in the media, further fraying their relationship.

"He didn't call, he didn't text. He didn't tell me that he was going to do this. I texted him and said, 'Look, I want to sit down and talk.' Because we had only spoken once since then, I said, 'I'd love to sit down and talk about an endorsement,'" Haley told CNN in January after Scott endorsed Trump. "He said, 'I'm getting with my team to figure that out.' And I never heard anything else again until his endorsement."

Since Scott's endorsement of Trump, he's gone to great lengths to not publicly criticize Haley. At Trump's New Hampshire primary night watch party, Trump appeared to suggest that Scott endorsed him because he disliked Haley - a sentiment Scott quickly dismissed.

"She actually appointed you, Tim," Trump said to Scott, who behind Trump on stage. "You must really hate her."

"I just love you," Scott replied, stepping to the microphone for the audience to hear.

The Haley campaign has taken a sharper stance against Scott, led notably by Haley's son Nalin. At multiple campaign stops in South Carolina in recent weeks, Haley's son has labeled Scott "Senator Judas" in introductory remarks. Haley has suggested she doesn't approve of Nalin attacking Scott publicly.

"You know, the last couple of times he's introduced me, he's tended to say things he really shouldn't say. In one instance, he referred to Tim Scott as Senator Judas," Haley told supporters in Kiawah Island, South Carolina, on Saturday. "So, I sat down with him today and I go, 'Nalin, I love you, but your job is not to make my life harder. I need you to keep focused on what we're trying to do.'"

Scott said the attacks from Haley's son reveal how the primary has made Haley "desperate," and dismissed the label as coming from "someone you would not take advice."

"***Politics*** makes people and their families desperate. It's unfortunate for a person with a high caliber of an individual that she has been to stoop down to having me and her family refer to me or anyone else as Judas Iscariot or any other name calling," Scott told CBS News on Sunday. "The one thing I will say to your viewers, when you are attacked, please remember this: Do not take criticism from someone you would not take advice."

Since endorsing Trump, Scott has inspired speculation, including from Trump himself, about the possibility of him joining the former president on the GOP ticket. Scott has conspicuously tacked closer to Trump's worldview in recent days, [*refusing to say*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/18/politics/tim-scott-2020-election-trump-vice-president/index.html) whether he would have overturned the results of the 2020 presidential election if he were vice president.

"I'm not going to answer hypothetical questions," Scott told CNN on Sunday in response to a question about the 2020 election.

As a senator, Scott voted to certify the results of the 2020 election. And last August, Scott said former Vice President Mike Pence "absolutely" did the right thing in certifying the election results.

Despite his own failed presidential bid, Scott has forcefully inserted himself into Trump's campaign, appearing alongside the former president at every public campaign event he's held in the state, helping Trump apply maximum pressure on Haley in the days leading up to the South Carolina primary. Trump praised Scott for his campaigning during a Fox News town hall in South Carolina on Tuesday.

"I have to say, in a very positive way, Tim Scott, he has been much better for me than he was for himself," Trump said.

CNN's Ebony Davis and Kate Sullivan contributed to this story.

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