

Nikki Haley: Confederate flag 'should have never been there'

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Gov. Nikki Haley on the removal of the Confederate Flag



The video of Nikki Haley, the flag hater, is no longer available.

(CNN) Shortly after the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina statehouse grounds, Gov. Nikki Haley told CNN's Don Lemon that placing the flag in 2000 was a poor decision.

"I think the more important part is it should have never been there," she said. "These grounds are a place that everybody should feel a part of. What I realized now more than ever is people were driving by and felt hurt and pain. No one should feel pain."

Haley, a rising star in the Republican Party, is the youngest current governor in the U.S. She is also the first woman and the first Indian American to serve as Governor of South Carolina.

Haley said the flag should be in a museum, a place that preserves history, not in a place where people gather to implement policies about the state's future.

"There is a place for that flag," she said. "It's not in a place that represents all people in South Carolina."

Changing her mind

Haley had previously been a supporter of the flag as a symbol of Southern heritage honoring residents' ancestors.

But it was the Friday night after a week of funerals for the Charleston Massacre victims that Haley said she decided that the flag had to come down.

Dylann Roof is accused of murdering nine people at a church shooting with the goal of starting a race war. He was repeatedly photographed with the Confederate Flag.

Haley stayed up late that Friday night discuss the situation with her husband.

"I told him what I was thinking and he told me I was right and that's all I needed," she said. "That next day I called the staff in."

Haley said she met with local leaders as well as South Carolina's federal delegation to share that she planned to give a speech calling for the removal of the flag.

"I said 'I will be forever grateful if you stand with me, but if you choose not to, I will hold no ill will,'" she said.

Some individuals supported Haley's shift in perspective, while others did not. The South Carolina Senate and House voted to remove the flag this week.

Looking Back

Haley said national conversation about being viewed differently because of your ethnicity forced her to reflect on her days growing up as a minority in a small town in South Carolina.

One day her father drove to Columbia to buy produce at a fruit stand when two police officers were called to the stand to keep their eyes on him. The officers just stood at the register until Haley's father made his purchase.

"I remember how bad that felt. And my dad went to the register, shook their hands, said thank you, paid for his things and not a word was said going home. I knew what had just happened," Haley said. "That produce stand is still there and every time I drive by it, I still feel that pain. I realized that that Confederate Flag was the same pain that so many people were feeling."

The future generation

Haley said the importance of teaching the next generation about how to treat people was a major motivator of her decision.

"The biggest reason I asked for that flag to come down was I couldn't look my children in the face and justify it staying there," she said.

Haley said racism is a reality that parents can't afford to ignore and must be proactive in addressing with their children.

"You're not born with hate, you're taught hate," she said. "Parents need to be very conscious of the fact that that flag hurts people and they need to talk to their kids about it."

South Carolina

The state took a lot of heat for the flag, Haley acknowledged. She spent much of her time trying to communicate to national audiences that the state was committed to moving forward.

The NCAA is dropping their 15 year boycott of the state because of the flag, and Haley said she hopes the NAACP does as well.

"Now there's more reason to come to this state. I am proud to say that it's a new day in South Carolina."

The flag didn't kill the Charleston nine. But removing it should help South Carolinians move forward in its quest for racial reconciliation, she said.

"I hope it gives those families a little bit of peace. That has always been my prayer and I hope this allows our state to heal," she said. "The grief of this tragedy is going to last for a really long time."