

Inaugural Address

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
JANUARY 12, 2011
THE STATEHOUSE, COLUMBIA

GOVERNOR NIKKI R. HALEY: I want to thank each and every one of you for coming out on this beautiful, chilly morning.

On this special day, I want to thank Michael and my two sweet children for the unconditional love and support they continue to show me. We as a family are honored to serve this great state.

Michael and I want to thank both of our families for the strength, guidance, and advice they give us during the best and the most challenging times. They are constant reminders of what it means to carry ourselves with grace and dignity.

We want to thank Governor Mark Sanford for his service to South Carolina and his fight for the citizens of this state.

To Ms. Jenny Sanford, thank you for representing South Carolina with strength and grace for the last eight years. Your friendship has meant so much to our family.

To the Sanford boys, thank you for allowing the people of South Carolina the opportunity to watch you grow up into fine young men. Rena and Nalin look forward to continuing your games and mazes at the Mansion.

Today is a great day in South Carolina!

It's a day for new beginnings. It's a day to turn the page from the past. And it's a day filled with anticipation of the next chapter in our state's future.

Before we talk about our bright future, it's important to pay respect to our past. Our state has an incredibly powerful and rich history. It is one that has not always been pleasant, but one that can teach us many great lessons.

We have a history of fierce independence, and that independence has some remarkable relevance for us today. While in 1773 it was the Tea Party in Boston that became famous, there was also a whole lot of tea dumped in the Charleston harbor that December. We declared independence from Great Britain some four months before Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. And at Kings Mountain just over our northern border, our local militia -- not professional soldiers -- helped turn the tide of the Revolutionary War that brought us the freedom we still enjoy to this day.

Let's see: tax protests, tea parties, the grassroots beating the professionals -- it does have a certain familiar ring to it.

Of course, when talking about our past, it would be wrong to mention our greatness during the revolutionary period without noting the ugliness of much that followed. The horrors of slavery and discrimination need not be

retold here. They too remain a part of our history and a part of the fabric of our lives.

But I do take comfort in, and agree with, the words of columnist George Will, when he recently wrote this about our state's past struggles: "If the question is which state has changed most in the last half-century, the answer might be California. But if the question is which state has changed most for the better, the answer might be South Carolina."

I stand before you today, the proud daughter of Indian immigrants. Growing up in rural, small town South Carolina, my family experienced this state and this country at its best. No, not every day was perfect. No, we were not always free from the burdens faced by those who look and sound different.

But we counted our blessings, and my parents reminded me and my brothers and sister every day how blessed we were to live in this country. We saw the constant example of neighbors helping neighbors.

For us, happiness existed in not knowing what we didn't have, and in knowing that what we did have was the opportunity to better our lives through hard work and strong values.

You see, my mother was offered one of the first female judgeships in her native country, but was unable to serve on the bench because of the challenges of being a woman in India. Now she sits here today watching her daughter become Governor of South Carolina, the state she proudly calls her home. When you grow up with a mom like that, the word "can't" is not in your vocabulary.

I will always be the proud daughter of immigrants. I will always cherish our family's experience. And I will always strive in my actions and in my words to make South Carolina a place where all of our children, regardless of race or gender, know that unlimited opportunities for happiness and success await them.

Today, our state and our nation face difficult times. Far too many of our fellow citizens are without a job. Our economy is not growing as it should. Our state budget has its largest shortfall ever.

But when I survey this troubled landscape, I am not discouraged. We have faced tougher times before and come through them. We know that tough times can produce some of the best decisions. And it is our duty to make this time of challenge into the opportunity it can be to turn our state around. It is indeed a new day, and on this new day, we must commit ourselves to the proposition that failure is not an option.

When I think on our present economic challenges, I am reminded of the words of Margaret Thatcher, who said: "Once we concede that public spending and taxation are [more] than a necessary evil, we have lost sight of the core values of freedom."

Nearly two years ago, the federal government in Washington decided to transfer its irresponsible fiscal practices to the states. And our state, like every other, accepted it. When we produce this year's budget, we will see the heavy price we pay for having done so.

In our coming actions, we must recognize that we will not produce the jobs our people deserve by placing higher tax burdens on our workers and our small businesses. And we will not reach prosperity by increasing state government's share of our economy.

Be assured, however, that I have every confidence we will achieve a much more prosperous place. And we will do so by going back to that spirit of independence that fueled South Carolina's leading role in defeating the strongest nation on earth two centuries ago.

When we embark on this new journey toward growth and prosperity, we must do so together, with one vision. A vision that is focused on the success of our families and businesses is a vision that is not impaired by partisanship, personalities, or distractions. We don't have time for that, and I won't stand for it.

Many times over the last eighteen months I asked South Carolinians to join a movement. That movement was never about one person or one election. Our state constitution requires the Governor and the General Assembly to work together to serve South Carolina well. And work together we will.

But the energy that drives our cooperation does not come from within this beautiful capitol building behind me. The energy comes from the sound of the people's voices. The success of the movement I asked you to join will be realized when elected officials are accountable for their votes, when citizen participation in government reaches new heights, and when the voice heard loudest is neither mine nor any other elected officials', but is that of the taxpayers of this state.

In the days, weeks, and months ahead, we have the opportunity to reduce state spending and make it more efficient. We have the opportunity to improve education and allow our children to be successful regardless of where they are born. We have the opportunity to strengthen our small businesses to help them create the jobs our people need. We have the opportunity to restructure our state government to make it more transparent, more accountable, and more respectful of the people of South Carolina.

We must seize these inspiring opportunities. If we do, we will have a state where good jobs are in constant supply, where South Carolina becomes the envy of the nation, and where we are so free of political distractions that the media is forced to report on good news. Just imagine that.

That is my South Carolina. It's the South Carolina I want for my children and for every family in our great state.

So, with faith in God, who knows what is right, And faith in our own ability to use the skills and judgment He gives us to do what is right, we can make this vision a reality.

Thank you. May God bless South Carolina. And may He continue to bless the United States of America.