

## Haley's Post-Iowa Push Will Be Too Little, Too Late

Her criticism of former President Donald Trump and vision outlined in her post-caucus speech should have started months ago.

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By **Mary Ellen Klas**

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Too little, too late. *Photographer: Rachel Mummey/Bloomberg*

After her 32-point drubbing in the Iowa caucuses, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley stood before her supporters Monday night and boldly proclaimed, “I can safely say, Iowa made this Republican primary a two-person race.” Then she packed her bags and headed for New Hampshire.

The former bookkeeper wasn’t making a math error. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is still in the race, although he’s bypassing the first-in-the-nation primary and heading straight to South Carolina. His campaign is on life support and Haley argues that because polls show

her within striking distance of former President Donald Trump in New Hampshire, she has a shot. But the joke's on her. It's too little, too late.

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Trump's blowout win in Iowa was dominant and complete. Republican voters showed they believe his Big Lie. They gave him a historic win with 51% of the vote, demonstrating once again why he may be the most successful con man in American history.

But Haley has hinted at what America knows: that the Iowa caucuses no longer serve as the nation's weather vane. She told a crowd in New Hampshire earlier this month that while "Iowa starts it. You know that you correct it."

Indeed, New Hampshire is the weakest early primary state for the former president, and because independents can vote in the Jan. 23 contest, Haley is drawing substantial support among a coalition of anti-Trump voters. She desperately needs a boost of momentum before her home state primary on Feb. 24.

After pulling her punches against Trump for months, Haley finally decided on a logical strategy Monday night. She used her post-caucus speech to give Trump supporters a face-saving path away from the former president and over to her side. It was a clunky speech, not artfully delivered, but the message was one she should have been voicing months ago.

She told supporters that she represents "a new generation of conservative leadership" whose vision for the future includes a "secure border," a strong economy and a path to "restore our national pride." She described Trump's vision as "more of the same," then equated it to reelecting President Joe Biden.

She carefully avoided using arguments that we now know don't work with most GOP voters: suggesting that Trump will threaten democracy, operate as an authoritarian who lies to the public, violate the oath of office, be immune from justice, punish opponents and

exceed his authority. Instead, Haley recognized that Trump supporters may know they have been duped by his lies and conspiracy theories but have excused him because he is a victim of political and corporate forces they also distrust. She put herself in their shoes.

“I voted for Donald Trump twice. I was proud to serve in his administration,” she began.

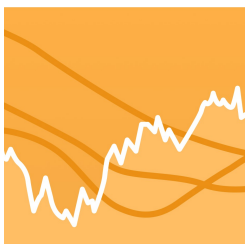
Trump is no better than Biden, Haley continued. “Trump and Biden are both about 80 years old. Trump and Biden both put our country trillions of dollars deeper in debt and our kids will never forgive them for it. Trump and Biden both lack a vision for our country's future because both are consumed by the past, by investigations, by vendettas, by grievances.”

(The last Trump-Biden example is hardly equivalent but Haley deserves credit for finally bringing up Trump’s grievance-riddled campaign.)

But New Hampshire won’t save Haley, and her gambit is even more of a long shot after trailing DeSantis in Iowa.

Trump leads Haley in her home state by more than 20 percentage points. Unlike New Hampshire, her state has an open primary and to have any hope of overtaking Trump there, she has to appeal to maybe-Trump voters as well as to those who have abandoned other defeated Republicans who consider Trump their second choice.

Iowa may no longer be representative of the national electorate, but it demonstrated the impossible task Haley has before her. More than 56,000 Iowans braved the sub-zero cold to reject DeSantis and Haley. They overlooked Trump’s legal woes, his assault on the Constitution, his two impeachment trials, the jury that found him liable for sexual abuse, his four indictments and array of other legal problems to endorse him for the most powerful job on earth.



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An [NBC News entrance poll](#) asked Iowa voters if they believed that “Biden legitimately won the presidency” and 66% bypassed facts and reality and responded that he hadn’t. Only 30% said Biden’s win was legitimate. The network also asked voters if Trump was fit to be president if he’s convicted on any of the 91 criminal charges he faces. A whopping 63% responded that he would be; only 32% said he would not.

Haley understands this dynamic. Trump supporters have been brainwashed by the lies echoed incessantly on Fox News and other right-wing media sites. They have convinced themselves he’s been unjustly targeted.

She reminded supporters that “Republicans have lost the popular vote in seven of the last eight presidential elections” and that her party should want to build a coalition “to earn the support of a majority of Americans.”

It’s a reasonable argument designed to appeal to reasonable people, which most Americans are when they hear all the facts.

Iowa pollster J. Ann Selzer told reporters they found a distinct lack of enthusiasm among caucus goers for Haley, unlike DeSantis’ voters, and much of her support came from independents and Democrats.

Haley has only one week left to make her argument to New Hampshire voters. If she doesn’t succeed there the primary is over, and the Trump-Biden rematch is on.

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– *With assistance from Patricia Lopez*

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