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Nikki Haley: a bridge to GOP's future

Steve Bakke  March 27, 2024



Nikki Haley entered the republican presidential contest and faithfully gave her many supporters praiseworthy effort. She told her story, made her case, and differentiated herself from other candidates, especially Donald Trump. Apart from Trump she was the last person standing. Yet her candidacy was berated by narrowly focused and short-sighted Trump loyalists and conservative media pundits.

There was little doubt after the Iowa caucuses that Trump would continue on his path to victory as the republican presidential nominee. Some observers speculated that Haley continued participation in primaries to be ready as a potential “back up” should Trump’s legal issues prevent his eventual candidacy. However, I don’t think that was a major motivation for her persistence.

Haley’s accomplishments resulted in nothing for which she should apologize. She was a much-needed alternative to the controversial former President. She recruited and retained many faithful voters and financial contributors until the end of her run. My assessment is that she was more than just an annoying speedbump for Trump.

During her active campaign, which ended after “Super Tuesday,” Haley accumulated a respectable 25% of the republican primary votes. She accomplished this by clearly separating herself from the “pack” of candidates by demonstrating her expertise and policies, foreign and domestic, acquired during her years as governor of South Carolina and as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. And she retains bragging rights regarding the fact that many polls predicted she would beat Joe Biden in a head-to head election.

I disagree with those who claim she was selfishly preventing an essential unifying effort by Trump. These critics were following the lead of the often-thin-skinned former president who doesn’t abide opposition of any kind and is known for too frequently reacting with the disgusting rhetoric of a neighborhood bully.

In 2018, Bill Bennett was asked to comment on Trump’s style. Given Bennett’s personal demeanor and his history with Presidents Reagan and H.W. Bush, many pundits were surprised with his answer. He contrasted those two presidents with Trump with this observation: “The times call for different types of characters and different types of grit. Sometimes in America you need Mother Theresa, sometimes you need Dirty Harry.” In other words, Americans saw something they needed in Donald Trump.

We are approaching a potential last hurrah for two senior politicians. I'm sure that reality is difficult for both of them to accept. The electorate also faces the reality that one of the elder duo will go home the winner and there'll be four years of massive frustration for a major portion of the electorate.

Whether you agree or disagree with that sentiment, the political careers of two controversial politicians will be coming to an end in the foreseeable future. The republican party must move on. And Haley's persistence in this year's primary accomplished a lot in maintaining that "large tent GOP" that's so critical for future political success.

Haley is the type of candidate republicans need to depend on in years to come. I believe that was part of her goal. She had the support of many who probably will stick with the GOP now and in into the future as payback for her dedicated effort in the primaries. She's a consistent conservative and has earned support from the political "middle" that Biden and the democrats have abandoned.

Regarding abortion, border control, immigration, inflation, energy policy, crime, and most foreign policy issues, Haley occupies a spot acceptable to a majority of Americans. And her style and decorum fit with most Americans' preferred presidential image.

If Haley had bailed out too soon, or if her effort seemed insincere, her primary supporters could have been lost to the GOP. She has the characteristics the party is looking for, and that extra time she spent on the campaign trail shined a light on her qualifications as a future party leader.

Nikki Haley was no quixotic pretender. She was a legitimate candidate who enhanced the future outlook for the GOP. She stubbornly defended her vision of a "big republican tent," while cementing her future party leadership.

My thanks go out to Nikki Haley who established herself as a valuable bridge to the future of the Grand Old Party.