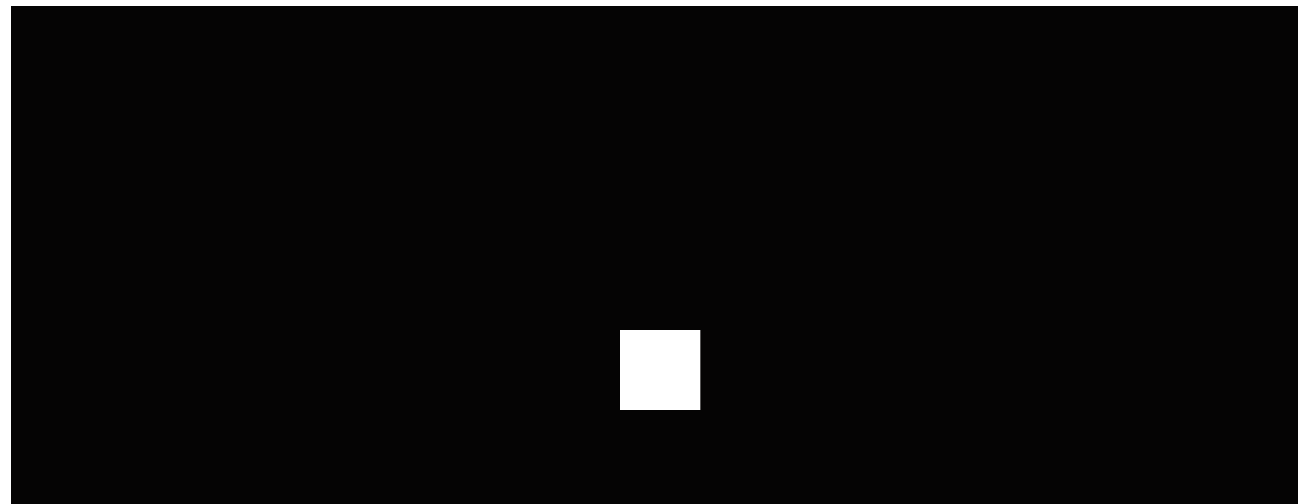


Nikki Haley, Ron DeSantis on possible Trump pardon; Christie hits Haley over Civil War remarks

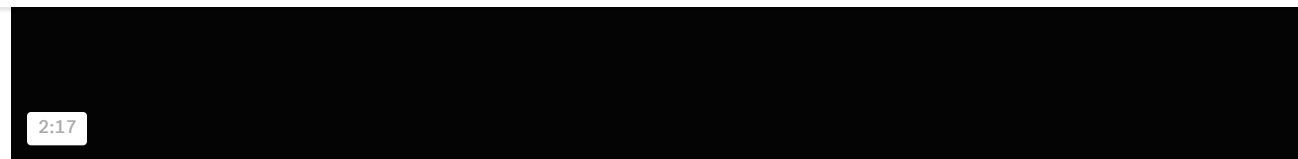
Candidates flocked to Iowa and New Hampshire this week ahead of the primaries.

By [Nicholas Kerr](#), [Abby Cruz](#), and [Kelsey Walsh](#)

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Nikki Haley faces backlash over town hall response
The Republican candidate was heavily criticized for not using the word "slavery" when dis...

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At a town hall in New Hampshire, Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley was asked by a 9-year-old audience member about her stance on Donald Trump and whether she would pardon him.

Haley, who is [rising in the polls](#) but is still a distant second to the former president in the state, said she would -- even if he's found guilty of a crime.

"A leader needs to find out what's in the best interest of the country," Haley evening. "What's in the best interest of the country is not letting an 80-year divide the country. What's in the best interest of the country would be to pa country and no longer talking about that."

With weeks to go until voting begins in the Republican primary, candidates this week to make their pitch to residents.

Though it's Trump, who faces state challenges to his ballot eligibility as wel cases (to which he's pleaded not guilty), who continues to [lead 2024 primary polls](#).



Nikki Haley faces backlash over town hall response

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, at a campaign stop in Iowa, was also pressed by a voter on whether he'd pardon Trump if he were convicted by a jury.

Unlike Haley, he largely avoided the question by briefly responding: "I've addressed that. But that's a different thing."

DeSantis has declined to answer that question directly when he's been asked, but earlier this month he said he would be against putting "an almost 80-year-old former president in prison" as it wouldn't be "good for the country."



Former UN ambassador and 2024 Republican presidential hopeful Nikki Haley speaks at a town hall campaign event at Kennett High School in North Conway, N.H., Dec. 28, 2023. Republic...
AFP/Getty Images

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Meanwhile, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie -- the most vocal Trump critic in the GOP primary field -- is trying to connect Haley's view of Trump to her [comments about the cause of the Civil War](#).

Haley faced backlash after she didn't mention slavery when asked what caused the Civil War at an event on Wednesday night. She then spent much of Thursday seeking to clarify her remarks, saying "of course" the conflict was about slavery but that it was also about "freedom" and the role of government.

MORE: Nikki Haley expands on Civil War comment after backlash→

Nikki Haley faces backlash over town hall response

Christie, during a town hall in New Hampshire on Thursday night, told the audience that Haley isn't "racist" or "dumb" but the reason why she gave that response is "just as bad if not worse" and should warrant concern about her candidacy.

"She did it because she's unwilling to offend anyone by telling the truth," he offered.

"If she is unwilling to stand up and say that slavery is what caused the Civil War, because she's afraid of offending constituents in some other part of the country, if she's afraid to say that Donald Trump is unfit because she's afraid of offending people who support Donald Trump ... What's going to happen when she has to stand up to [Russian President] Vladimir Putin and President Xi in China?"

Haley swiped at Christie that same night, saying he's "obsessed" with his dislike of Trump.

"And Chris is a friend of mine, but if you go in with that kind of obsession, you're not going in with the clarity of moving our country forward," she said at her third town hall of the day in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

ABC News' Alexandra Hutzler contributed to this report.

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