

# Lawmakers, Republican candidates split over Confederate flag display

By McClatchy Washington Bureau, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.23.15

Word Count **883**



Protesters stand near a flying Confederate flag during a rally to take down the flag at the South Carolina Statehouse in Columbia, S.C., June 20, 2015. Photo: AP Photo/Rainier Ehrhardt

WASHINGTON — South Carolina’s leading federal lawmakers and the 2016 Republican presidential candidates are divided over what to do about the Confederate battle flag that flies on the State House grounds.

Questions about the flag have resurfaced since the killing of nine black churchgoers in Charleston.

Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina, who as assistant Democratic leader is the highest-ranking African-American member of the House, said the flag needs to be removed.

The flag is a symbol of the Confederacy, the side that fought during the Civil War to keep slavery in the American South.

## **Flag Symbolism Cited In Church Shooting**

“That is a flag of rebellion,” Clyburn said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” He said that the flag is one example of factors that create an environment in which tragedies like the shooting are able to take place. Clyburn also cited the fact that the 21-year-old shooting suspect, Dylann Roof, has been seen in photographs online wearing racist symbols and had burned the U.S. flag.

Senator Tim Scott, a Republican from South Carolina, said the Confederate flag is part of the “rich and provocative history” of the state while also acknowledging that it also “represents pain and oppression” for some.

He declined to take a position on the flag Sunday but said he would participate in discussions about the flag and race relations in the wake of last week’s church shooting.

“My voice will be clear,” Scott, who is one of two African-American senators, said on CBS’s “Face The Nation.” “My position will be stated. I’m not going to make any breaking news here. I have made the commitment to wait until after the funeral to start that debate. And I’m going to honor that commitment.”

## **Civil War Pride Or Racist View?**

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a presidential candidate from South Carolina, said, “It’s time for people in South Carolina to revisit” the 2000 compromise that moved the flag from atop the State House to the building’s grounds.

“(That) would be fine with me, but this is part of who we are,” Graham said Friday on CNN. “The flag represents to some people a civil war, and that was the symbol of one side. To others, it’s a racist symbol, and it’s been used in a racist way.”

Other Republican presidential candidates are split on what to do.

The question became amplified after former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential candidate, posted on Twitter Saturday: “Take down the #ConfederateFlag at the SC Capitol. To many, it is a symbol of racial hatred. Remove it now to honor #Charleston victims.”

## **Candidates Call For Debate Within State**

Some insist it’s a state issue.

Former Senator Rick Santorum, a Republican from Pennsylvania, said Sunday on ABC’s “This Week” that “I don’t think the federal government or federal candidates should be making decisions on everything. This is a decision that needs to be made here in South Carolina.”

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee had a similar view. He said on “Meet the Press” that voters don’t want candidates giving their views on every “little issue in all 50 states.”

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker urged more time and debate. “I think they’re going to have a good, healthy debate, and should have a healthy debate in South Carolina among officials at the state level,” he said Saturday. “Before we have that discussion, we should allow the families of the loved ones to bury their dead,” Walker said.

Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, said he understands both sides of the issue, but that it’s an issue for South Carolina residents to decide.

There were those who said the flag should come down.

Ohio Governor John Kasich, who is expected to announce his presidential candidacy in the next few weeks, said in a statement Saturday: “This is up to the people of South Carolina to decide, but if I were a citizen of South Carolina, I’d be for taking it down.”

## **Florida Faced Similar Decision**

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and then Secretary of State Katherine Harris, had a Confederate flag removed from the Florida state Capitol in 2001. At the time Bush said “I thought it was appropriate to take those flags down and put them in the museum where people can appreciate our heritage, but not have them fly as a symbol of what we are today as a state.”

Senator Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida, said Saturday that “ultimately the people of South Carolina will make the right decision for South Carolina, and I believe in their capacity to make that decision. The next president of the United States will not make that decision. That’s up for the people of South Carolina to make, and I think they’ll make the right one like they’ve made them in the past.”

Rubio said he supported taking down the flag in Florida. He also supported a measure saying no war artifacts “may be relocated, removed, disturbed or altered.”

Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina, speaking to reporters at last week’s Faith and Freedom Coalition’s conference in Washington, said the Confederate flag is “clearly a symbol that is very offensive to many” but that her personal opinion was not important.

She added that “What’s relevant here is what the people of South Carolina choose to do next.”

## Quiz

- 1 How is the shooting suspect, Dylann Roof, connected to the issue of the Confederate flag?
  - (A) Roof was known to wear racist symbols, which has called into question whether South Carolina should fly the Confederate flag.
  - (B) The Confederate flag was the main reason that led Roof to kill nine black churchgoers in Charleston.
  - (C) For many, the Confederate flag is a symbol of racism and Roof was known to burn the American flag because of racism.
  - (D) The Confederate flag dates back to the Civil War and Roof was proud of the men who gave their lives for the Confederacy.
  
- 2 According to the article, who would Representative James Clyburn MOST LIKELY disagree with?
  - (A) Former Governor Jeb Bush
  - (B) Former Governor Mitt Romney
  - (C) Senator Lindsey Graham
  - (D) Governor John Kasich
  
- 3 Which of the following supports the claim that some Republican candidates will never express their opinion on the Confederate flag?
  - (A) They do not want to hurt their support base by offering an opinion.
  - (B) They believe the recent killings are unrelated to the issue of the Confederate flag flying at the State House.
  - (C) They disagree with other candidates about what to do about the Confederate flag on the State House grounds.
  - (D) They believe the issue should be decided by the citizens of South Carolina.

4 Each selection includes a reason the Confederate flag should be removed EXCEPT:

- (A) He [Clyburn] said that the flag is one example of factors that create an environment in which tragedies like the shooting are able to take place.
- (B) Take down the #ConfederateFlag at the SC Capitol. To many, it is a symbol of racial hatred.
- (C) He [Mike Huckabee] said on "Meet the Press" that voters don't want candidates giving their views on every "little issue in all 50 states."
- (D) [Carly Fiorina] said the Confederate flag is "clearly a symbol that is very offensive to many" but that her personal opinion was not important.

## Answer Key

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- (D) [Carly Fiorina] said the Confederate flag is “clearly a symbol that is very offensive to many” but that her personal opinion was not important.