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Elections

Gingrich Blasts Through SC Primary Like 'Tsunami'

Triumphant candidate greets rabid crowd in Columbia, and now sets his sights on Florida.

By [Hal Millard](#) [Email the author](#) January 21, 2012

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Newt Gingrich supporters greeted the former House Speaker with a rock-star-like reception on Saturday in Columbia, S.C. Credit [Adam Crisp](#)

This story has been updated.

As the wine flowed and the music blared Saturday night, a triumphant Newt Gingrich and several hundred rabid supporters celebrated a resounding victory over the rest of the Republican field and vowed to take the fight on to Florida.

Introducing Gingrich to a capacity crowd at the Hilton Hotel ballroom in Columbia, Billy Wilkins, a former Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, said: "Make no mistake about it. This was a landslide victory."

"This was the political version of a tsunami," he said to rousing applause.

Onstage, Gingrich told the crowd: "With your help, we are now moving on to Florida -- and beyond."

The victory Saturday was Gingrich's first after dismal showings in Iowa and New Hampshire, and it was stunning in its scope. Trailing in polls just a few days ago, [Gingrich garnered a whopping 41 percent of the vote, to 27 percent for Mitt Romney, 17 percent for Rick Santorum, and 13 percent for Ron Paul.](#) Gingrich won all but three counties.

With the outcome settled nearly as soon as the polls closed, the crowd in Columbia had plenty of time to whip themselves in a hot and sweaty frenzy as they waited for Gingrich and his entourage of family, friends and advisors.

"I predicted double digits this week," said Richard Brothers of Tilton, N.H., who had to shout over the music and crowd noise to be heard.

"I've been working up in Spartanburg and Greenville, and I'd say at least 48 out of 50 people I talked to this week said they were voting for Newt. ... This is fantastic."

With the win, said Raymond Moore of Lexington, it doesn't guarantee the GOP nomination, but it definitely sends a message to the rest of the nation, including Florida, which holds the next primary.

"Every place he goes, he's going to be able to show people, 'I can go the distance; I'm a heavy hitter, and I'm not going to take any nonsense,'" said

Moore.

"I'm very, very excited. This is America in action right here. Newt's a heavy hitter, and we're going to need a heavy hitter. We need somebody who can go up against a billion dollars. That's what they say, Obama's going to raise a billion dollars."

After a hard and often nasty South Carolina race, Gingrich mostly found good things to say about his opponents. Santorum, he said, "showed tremendous courage," championing socially conservative values and taking a tough stand against Iran. Gingrich lauded Paul's economic policies, which focused on strict fiscal conservatism and abolition of the Federal Reserve.

Gingrich said he had talked earlier with Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who dropped out of the race this week and threw his support to Gingrich. The candidate said he appreciated Perry's "passion for the 10th Amendment," and added: "I look forward working with him to return power to the states."

As for Romney, Gingrich's chief competitor, said: "He's a good example for America. He's hard-working, and he's been very successful."

Speaking like the presumptive nominee, Gingrich kept his powder dry in order to go after President Obama and the media elite whom, he said, "do not represent" Americans, with their "leftist, radical view of America."

"I articulate the deepest felt values of the American people," Gingrich said.

Running in South Carolina, he said, had been "very humbling, very sobering" as he reached out and was rewarded by people "who so deeply want to get their country back on the right track."

"In America, you have the chance to make your case, no matter what the elites say," Gingrich said. "We don't want to run a Republican campaign, We want to run an American campaign. Because we are optimists about the future, and Americans have always been optimistic about the future.

"This is the most important election of our lifetime," he added. "I believe that if we just unleash the American people, we can rebuild America."

If nominated, Gingrich said, "I plan to take it straight to the president and straight to the elite media."

Said supporter Tina Blackmon of Graniteville: "Gingrich has got all the things we need in America. Obamacare has got to go. I think he's going to bring back Reaganomics, put people back to work, and fix the tax code. He stands for everything we need."

Blackmon believes Saturday's win was huge for Gingrich.

"He won here, he's going to take the White House," she said with certainty.

Nikki Trawick of Columbia, chairwoman of the Northeast Republican Women in Richland County, was practically giddy with the Gingrich win.

"I think it's a great day for South Carolina. It's a great day for our country," she said. "And I think Speaker Gingrich being the winner, what an amazing thing. Very cool. I know right now that he's not the frontrunner in Florida, but that can change. I think the momentum that's here tonight, we're going to propel him into Florida. He's got solutions -- and we need solutions."

Reported earlier: Close to 500 supporters are gathered in the ballroom at the Columbia Hilton.

The overflow crowd is excited and amped as they wait for former Speaker Newt Gingrich to speak.

"The next stop is the White House," said an excited Tina Blackmon, a supporter of the campaign.

There is a festive mood in the ballroom as the alcohol is flowing and music is playing, creating a nightclub effect for attendees.

Former Judge Billy Wilkins, another Gingrich supporter, said: "Make no mistake this was a landslide victory, the political version of a tsunami."

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