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A Political Moment to Savor: A black Republican wins a GOP nomination in South Carolina.

State representative Tim Scott, a black Republican, has won the GOP primary in South Carolina's First Congressional District. It's not particularly big news in the mainstream media; perhaps Republican victories are always unwelcome — particularly ones that put a tiny chip in the image of the GOP as whites-only. In fact, it's a moment to savor.

Scott's opponent was Paul Thurmond, who got a mere 32 percent of the vote. Not even close, in other words. The young Mr. Thurmond is the son of the late U.S. senator Strom Thurmond, who led the segregationist Dixiecrat rebellion from the Democratic party in 1948 and filibustered the 1957 civil-rights bill for a record 24 hours and 18 minutes.

But that was a different time and another world. Such was the impact of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that even Strom was forced to change. By the 1970s, he was securing federal funds for South Carolina's black mayors and black colleges, and extending his famed constituent services to black voters.

The First Congressional District is only 20 percent black, with a miniscule number likely to participate in a GOP primary. Thus both candidates were competing for the white vote. Former Alaska governor Sarah Palin and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee endorsed Scott, while Thurmond was the choice of much of the state's Republican-party establishment. Perhaps the name carried some negative baggage. "This is a state which has gotten tired of its reputation for religious and racial intolerance," Brian McGee, a professor at the College of Charleston, told Bloomberg News.

The solidly Republican district, which John McCain won with 56 percent of the vote, is based in Charleston and runs along much of the state's Atlantic coastline. Scott owns an insurance company and is a partner in a real-estate firm. He graduated from Charleston Southern University (a Baptist school) in 1988, and served for 13 years on the Charleston county council.

When Scott was elected to the state house of representatives in 2008, he was the first black Republican there in over 100 years. And if Scott prevails in November, as is likely, he will be the first black Republican to serve in Congress since the retirement of Oklahoma's J. C. Watts in 2003 — and the first black to represent any southern state in Congress since Reconstruction.

It is often said that southern whites will not vote for black candidates. Wrong. They will not vote for blacks with the far-left message of most of the Congressional Black Caucus. Scott doesn't fit the mold. Get on his website; his message is that of a solid Republican:

“If I can seek opportunity, not security, I want to take the calculated risk to dream and build, to fail and to succeed. I refused to barter incentive for dole.” He describes himself as a “believer in small government” and entrepreneurship, as well as an opponent of Obamacare. “President Obama’s health care bill taxes too much, spends too much, is bad for our health care, and is unconstitutional. Tim Scott will fight against government takeover of health care,” his site reads.

The site also contains a video of Scott talking to voters. Not a trace of a southern accent — in sharp contrast to the state’s GOP gubernatorial candidate, Nikki Haley. Indeed, just listening to him, not knowing his color, one might think he was a northern white. His race- and region-neutral voice will likely be an asset should he seek higher office in the future.

Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele made a big push for black candidates, most of whom either have lost primary elections or are expected to lose in November. But a win is a win — even if it turns out to be only one. Tim Scott will not be the first black Republican to secure public office, assuming he takes the district in November. His predecessors, however, have been few and far between. Many on the left will continue to describe American race relations as basically unchanged since the days of Strom Thurmond; true patriots know differently. And Scott’s victory is welcome evidence that of course they’re right — if we needed it.

— Abigail Thernstrom is the author, most recently, of *Voting Rights — and Wrongs: The Elusive Quest for Racially Fair Elections*. She is an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and vice chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.