

September 27, 2019

Dr. Aldona Wos and Nikki Hayley Kick Off Elon University's 2019-2020 Speaker Series

Dr. Aldona Wos, former ambassador to Estonia, moderated a question-and-answer session with Nikki Haley, former South Carolina governor and former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Nikki Haley was the featured speaker during Elon University's Fall Convocation in what was the first in the university's 2019-20 Speaker Series.



Drawing from her experiences growing up a minority in South Carolina, a state she would later lead as governor, Nikki Haley said she learned to focus on the similarities between people, not the differences. It was a lesson she said she would later lean upon as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations as she looked to find common ground while promoting the country's values and interests.

"That lesson I learned on the playground has literally played out throughout my life," Haley told the crowd that filled the Schar Center Friday during Fall Convocation. "When you are faced with a challenge, if you first discuss what you have in common, and then get to the challenges, everyone lets their guard down and then you can have a discussion."

Haley offered remarks followed by a question-and-answer session with Dr. Aldona Wos. The theme running throughout the series is the quest for truth, an idea that Haley zeroed in on during the close of her discussion with Wos.

"With freedom of expression, especially on college campuses, instead of yelling at each other for being wrong, ask them why they think the way they do, and have that conversation," Haley said. "You will become a smarter, more intelligent person when you understand both sides of an argument and when you respect it."

Haley's remarks were routinely met with applause by the thousands who attended Fall Convocation, which fell on the opening day of the annual Family Weekend celebration. A former member of the administration of President Donald Trump, Haley stepped down as ambassador at the end of 2018, and has enjoyed high approval ratings not just from those in her own Republican Party, but also Democrats and Independents.

Haley's remarks in Schar Center centered largely on her service as U.N. ambassador, a time during which she says she challenged oppressive regimes, stood up for American values and was willing to lobby to human rights, though some at times were critical of her stances. "My travel took me to places most Americans will never see," she said. "I sat across the table from

representatives of the world's worst regimes. What I saw shaped me as a leader. It taught me things about America. It made most arguments on Twitter these days seem very small."

"I'm optimistic about your generation's ability to do the right thing, to be advocates for the rights we have, not by virtue of what country you were born in, but by virtue of our humanity," Haley said. "We must always strive to be a better people and a more perfect human, but in the end, there is one truth about our country, and I believe it with all my heart — even on our worst day, we are blessed to be in America."

During the question-and-answer session with Dr. Wos, Haley fielded questions submitted by Elon students that probed her thoughts on the countries she faced off with at the United Nations, the policy positions she staked out, and future threats the country may face, such as cybersecurity. "When you look at cyber threats especially, it's a very cheap weapon of war, so you will see it used much more often," Haley said. "But I personally think that we shouldn't be looking at the government to do this. We should pull from the private sector."



Asked about negotiating with Russia and what threat that country may pose, Haley cautioned that the country will never be a friend of the United States. "What they do is they go into areas and they cause chaos," Haley said. "That way, they suddenly become a player. ... That doesn't mean we don't talk to them, but it means we keep them at arm's length, and we keep an eye on them."

"The part we have to remember about freedom of expression is — you don't have to agree with it, but we are blessed to be in a country where you can say it, and you have the right to say it, even if you are standing alone," Haley said. "Sometimes standing alone is hard, but sometimes there are 10 other people who are quiet that are waiting to hear someone else say it."