

Florida Governor DeSantis sacks elected state prosecutor for speaking out against anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ legislation

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On Thursday, Florida governor Ron DeSantis suspended and effectively fired Hillsborough County State Attorney and Democrat Andrew Warren for speaking out against some of the provocative and anti-democratic laws DeSantis has signed in recent months, including anti-abortion legislation that severely restricts the procedure in the state and discriminatory policies against LGBTQ youth.

In DeSantis' "Executive Order of Suspension," the governor cites "neglect of duty," "willful defiance," and "incompetence" among the reasons for Warren's suspension. The order cites a case law from 1937 in which a Tampa prosecutor was accused of not prosecuting people under gambling laws. Under a clause in the state Constitution, DeSantis' suspension of Warren has effectively fired him.

The Governor and state Attorney General Ashley Moody announced their decision to remove the prosecutor at a news conference in Tampa. DeSantis was surrounded by police officers as he told the audience the attorney had "put himself publicly above the law" and violated his "oath of office" after Warren signed a letter jointly with prosecutors nationwide pledging not to prosecute people who "seek, provide, or support abortions" and which repudiated efforts to restrict gender-affirming health care.

In his speech, DeSantis adopted the pitch of a veritable tyrant, hellbent on suppressing free speech and attacking his political opponents. The governor imperiously declared, "Our government is a government of laws, not a government of men. When you're saying you're not going to enforce certain laws you don't like, that's a neglect of duty." He said further, "I don't think the people of Hillsborough County want to have an agenda that is basically woke, where you're deciding that your view of social justice means certain laws shouldn't be enforced."

DeSantis' decision amounts to a rebuke of the 369,129 Hillsborough voters who cast a ballot for Warren in the 2020 state attorney's election. Warren won 53.4 percent of the vote. He was first elected to the office in 2016 by fewer than 5,000 votes, removing longtime Republican incumbent Mark Ober.

Warren was escorted out of his office Thursday morning and held a news conference later that afternoon at a law firm's downtown Tampa office. Opposing the suspension, the state attorney said in his remarks that he was "still the duly elected state attorney for Hillsborough County," and called the governor's

accusations "pure conjecture and lies."

The prosecutor mentioned DeSantis' 2024 presidential election as a motivating factor behind the suspension. Pointing to the anti-democratic nature of his firing, Warren said the governor was "trying to overthrow the results of a fair and free election, two of them."

The joint prosecutor's letter was released late last month and obviously exploded a prolonged vendetta held by DeSantis against the attorney, as Warren did not have any cases relating to abortion or gender-affirming care pending in his legal office.

The joint statement, titled the "Joint Statement From Elected Prosecutors" opposes the reactionary nationwide offensive following the Supreme Court's decision in June which ripped away the constitutional right to abortion. The letter notes that "Enforcing abortion bans runs counter to the obligations and interests we are sworn to uphold. It will erode trust in the legal system, hinder our ability to hold perpetrators accountable, take resources away from the enforcement of serious crime, and inevitably lead to the traumatization and criminalization of victims of sexual violence."

According to the prosecutor's letter, "Criminalizing abortion will not end abortion; it will simply end safe abortions, forcing the most vulnerable among us — as well as medical providers — to make impossible decisions." This point underscores the grim reality of American history prior to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision which upheld the right to abortion, when many women died or suffered mutilation after being forced to undergo back alley operations.

It is not clear whether Warren's removal from office will be permanent since the Florida Senate must decide whether to reinstate him or remove him completely. The Senate must send out a notice of an initial hearing for the case within 90 days, per Senate rules, no doubt carefully timed by DeSantis since the deadline is just days before the state's gubernatorial election in November.

At DeSantis' press conference, he said Warren first garnered the attention of Republican lawmakers after the governor noticed prosecutors in Los Angeles and San Francisco were selectively enforcing crimes. The governor then asked his staff "to make sure that that was not going to happen here."

After speaking with several state police and prosecutors, his staff

mentioned Warren's name repeatedly. "It all came back to this area here, in the 13th Judicial Circuit in Hillsborough County," DeSantis said. "And the response that we got was a lot of frustration on the part of law enforcement for criminals being let go and crimes not being prosecuted."

This statement was significant, as it reveals Warren's firing represents broader plans on the part of the DeSantis administration to escalate its attacks against the working class, giving police and other state forces a rubber stamp to employ the most brutal tactics, impose excessively harsh and disproportionate sentences, and restricting legal protections for those caught in the crosshairs of law enforcement.

One recent example of this is a Florida traffic law signed last month which criminalizes loud music while driving. The law makes it illegal for passengers to drive a car with a stereo system that could be heard 25 feet away. Moreover, it prohibits louder music anywhere near schools, churches, or hospitals. This ludicrous measure permits Florida police to stop drivers and issue them a noncriminal infraction for playing music "plainly audible." The fine for this violation in Pinellas County is \$116.

The legal justifications for DeSantis' order are all the more unfounded since the order does not cite any of Warren's cases or examples of him prosecuting individuals. Instead, DeSantis' order vindictively points to Warren's public comments on abortion, transgender issues and office policies Warren has adopted.

Warren previously earned the ire of Republican officials for being an outspoken critic of a slew of undemocratic laws the governor signed, such as the so-called "anti-riot" bill signed last year which was aimed at criminalizing protests against police violence in the wake of the 2020 murder of George Floyd and the massive popular demonstrations held around the state.

Then came the creation of the "Office of Election Crime and Security" in December of 2021, which is an investigative unit that would give DeSantis and future governors unprecedented and sweeping authority over election-related investigations.

The new election office, to which Warren directed lukewarm criticism in a *Tampa Bay Times* article, was meant to bolster DeSantis' credentials by further supporting former President Trump's baseless claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election and supplement newly enacted Florida election laws limiting the use of ballot drop boxes and mail-in ballots.

Florida's 15-week abortion ban that DeSantis signed into law this year was temporarily halted but quickly restored last month after lawyers for the state appealed a Leon County circuit judge's injunction against the procedure. The injunction was in effect less than an hour before the state appealed the injunction, which automatically nullified it.

Warren cited the 68-page injunction in announcing he was bound by Florida Supreme Court precedent which ruled in 1989 that Florida's right to privacy was enshrined in the state Constitution and protected the right to an abortion. DeSantis and Republican lawmakers are currently trying to overturn that precedent.

The firing of the Warren has followed a trail of other repressive actions against DeSantis' opponents, including substantial efforts to suppress criticism of his fascist legislation.

Warren's firing comes several months after DeSantis denounced

the tourism and entertainment giant Disney after executives voiced public opposition to the "Parental Rights in Education" bill, otherwise called the "Don't Say Gay" bill by critics, a statute embraced by the far-right which bans classroom discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in Florida's primary schools.

Following critical comments from Disney's Chief Executive, DeSantis signed bills that targeted and wiped out the company's Reedy Creek Improvement District, which provided water, sewer, electric power and public safety for millions of Walt Disney's visitors, employees and residents. The attack subsequently placed all the debts and obligations of the state-funded district on the local county, straining the county's budget.

Warren's firing also recalls the sacking of Rebekah Jones, a former Florida Department of Health employee who was granted whistleblower status a year after being fired for speaking out against and exposing the state government's campaign to reopen schools and workplaces amid the raging COVID-19 pandemic. Jones gained national notoriety for refusing to strategically manipulate the state's COVID-19 related data and minimize the severity of the pandemic. This led to her being bitterly lambasted by DeSantis, who claimed she showed "insubordination" and "blatant disrespect."

Months after being fired, Jones was the target of a Gestapo-style police raid on her home in December of 2020, as law enforcement pointed their guns at her husband and children, seized her phone, computers, and other equipment in an effort to eliminate her work on a website she launched to keep actual accurate track of Florida's COVID-19 information.

Although Warren expressed opposition to his suspension by DeSantis, he refused to acknowledge Thursday whether he would legally challenge the action. As of this writing, no major statement has been issued by the state or national Democratic Party opposing this blatant assault on democratic rights. Neither Florida's agricultural commissioner Nikki Fried, nor former house representative Charlie Crist, both of whom are Democratic front runners for the this year's governor's race, have issued a public statement condemning the firing.

There is every reason to expect the Democratic Party's response to the attack on Warren will be similar to their ongoing cover-up of the role that Trump, the Republican Party and substantial sections of the military, police and intelligence agencies played in the violent January 6 coup attempt.

Despite a mountain of evidence incriminating Trump and his co-conspirators, nearly all of them have gone unindicted and none imprisoned for their nearly successful attempt at nullifying the certification of President Biden and installing Trump as president-dictator.



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