

Florida Governor DeSantis signs new legislation restricting abortion rights, expanding the death penalty

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Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law on Thursday which will prohibit women in that state from obtaining an abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy. Given the fact that many women do not learn they are pregnant until after six weeks have past, the new law serves as a de facto ban on the procedure, which was constitutionally protected for decades before the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year.

The bill passed in the state House of Representatives by a 70-40 margin. State Democrats attempted to derail the legislation by introducing a series of amendments that would invalidate the bill's main provisions, but all were swiftly voted down by the Republican supermajority. Last year, the same legislature passed a similar ban that prohibits abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

The earlier ban was challenged in court as a violation of the Florida state constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy. If the state Supreme Court upholds the earlier law, then the six-week ban will take effect.

The new law is an assault on the democratic rights of all women in Florida, but its impact will be felt most directly by the poor and working class who, already deprived of adequate medical care and lacking the resources to seek abortions out of state, will be compelled to carry their pregnancies to term or face imprisonment.

Florida's new abortion ban comes only six days after a Christian fundamentalist judge in Texas overturned the FDA's approval of the abortion drug mifepristone, which has been approved for use for the last 20 years and was used by 500,000 women in 2022. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v.*

Wade there are now 13 states that outlaw abortion completely, most without exceptions for rape or incest. Another five states, including Florida, have gestational limits of six weeks to 20 weeks.

The ban lacks popular support in Florida. In a recent poll taken by the University of North Florida, 75 percent of respondents were either somewhat or strongly opposed to the ban, including 61 percent of Republicans. This has not influenced DeSantis, who has set his sights on becoming president. The entire campaign of right-wing social engineering he has embarked upon, along with his lackeys in the state legislature, is directed at that goal.

In order to realize this aim, DeSantis must capture the allegiance of the right-wing Republican electoral base, which in most polls prefers former president Donald Trump by a commanding margin. Emboldened by a section of Republican donors and a compliant capitalist media, DeSantis has committed to breaking through this impasse by placing himself on the cutting edge of political reaction.

To this end he has signed into law a raft of bills since the opening of the Florida legislative session in March. Most recently, the legislature approved a bill expected to be signed by DeSantis which eliminates the need for a unanimous vote by a jury to impose a death sentence in a capital case. The new law would only require eight of 12 jurors to vote in favor of the death penalty for the presiding judge to impose that sentence.

DeSantis first floated the idea of eliminating the unanimous jury requirement after Parkland school shooter Nikolas Cruz was spared the death penalty after the jury in his case failed to vote unanimously for that sentence. The unanimous jury requirement has been in

place since 2017 when the Florida Supreme Court ruled that the previous system, where the judge had the final word in sentencing, was unconstitutional. After DeSantis was elected in 2019, he appointed new judges to the state Supreme Court who reversed the earlier decision.

In 2018, the mentally ill Cruz slaughtered 17 people with an assault rifle that he had legally purchased. This massacre was preceded in 2016 by the second worst mass shooting in US history when a similarly armed gunman killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Gun violence and homicide are common throughout the state. Last month, DeSantis signed a new law which is highly likely to increase the likelihood of mass shooter events.

Dubbed “constitutional carry” by its supporters—and already law in many, mostly Midwestern states—the new legislation eliminates the need for a permit to carry a concealed weapon. The law has little support outside of the State House in Tallahassee. In a poll taken by the University of North Florida, 77 percent of respondents opposed the bill, including 61 percent who identify as Republican. The lack of popular support in Florida for the legislation is disregarded by the governor in favor of the endorsement of the National Rifle Association in the 2024 presidential race, which will be critical if he hopes to win the election.

After spending much of the last year using his executive power to extend control over Florida’s public education system—instituting censorship on a broad scale, eliminating sex education, and empowering the most backward layers in the state to take control of local school boards—DeSantis recently signed legislation that will gut public education in Florida and channel billions of taxpayer dollars to private charter school operators.

The new law provides annual subsidies of up to \$8,500 per student to pay for private school tuition, regardless of a family’s income level. The law will add further strains to the already dilapidated public education system and will further enrich the con artists who operate the state’s many charter school companies. Similar laws have been passed recently in other states, including Arizona and West Virginia.

DeSantis has made no attempt to conceal the naked political motivations for his agenda. Another piece of legislation, already passed by the state Senate, would

eliminate automatic dues payment for most public sector unions. It would also require that 60 percent of a union’s membership pay dues or be decertified. The current law requires only 50 percent. However, police and firefighters unions, who endorsed DeSantis in the last election, would be exempt from the new requirements.

This legislation is in transparent retaliation against the state’s teachers unions, who—despite collaborating with the governor in forcing students back into unsafe classrooms at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and having consistently thwarted their members’ struggle for better pay and working conditions—issued a few meek statements criticizing DeSantis for not providing them with sufficient political cover.



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