

# DeSantis, “MAGA” Republicans and WSJ editorial board lionize vigilante killer Daniel Penny

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Following the arraignment of New York subway strangler and former Marine Daniel Penny, 24, this past Friday, the *Wall Street Journal* and Republican politicians, most prominently Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, have launched a campaign in defense of the vigilante murderer.

Penny was charged with second-degree manslaughter after video of the former Marine strangling 30-year-old homeless man, Jordan Neely, on a crowded subway, drew widespread outrage on social media and around the world. After several days of protest by New York residents, Democratic District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a frequent target of attack by former President Donald Trump and the Republican Party, announced charges against Penny on Friday.

That same night charges were announced, the *Wall Street Journal*, one of the leading publications of the financial oligarchy, published a statement from the Editorial Board declaring Penny “the Subway Samaritan.”

Despite the fact that witnesses contend that Penny strangled Neely for roughly 15 minutes using a “bloodchoke,” and video shows Penny constricting Neely’s neck well after he stopped moving, the *Journal* argues, without evidence, “it’s clear [Penny’s] intention wasn’t to kill Neely. It was to protect himself and others. ... We sometimes call such men good samaritans (sic)...”

Less than an hour after the editorial was posted, Florida Governor and Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis regurgitated the editorial’s characterization of Penny as a “good Samaritan.”

Ginning up racists and neo-Nazi support for his rally in Iowa the following day, DeSantis tweeted an ultra-right defense of Penny, writing, “We must defeat the Soros-Funded DAs, stop the Left’s pro-criminal agenda, and take back the streets for law abiding citizens. We stand with Good

Samaritans like Daniel Penny. Let’s show this Marine ... America’s got his back.”

The governor included a link to a fundraiser set up by Penny’s lawyers on the “Christian” fundraising site GiveSendGo. While Penny had already raised hundreds of thousands of dollars prior to DeSantis’ tweet, over the weekend the fund has ballooned to nearly \$2 million.

GiveSendGo is the preferred online crowdfunding site for the far right. The website previously hosted a fundraiser for the honorary Proud Boy and Kenosha vigilante killer Kyle Rittenhouse, My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell, a prominent backer of Trump’s “stop the steal” fraud, and several January 6 defendants.

Vivek Ramaswamy, another Republican presidential candidate, approvingly retweeted DeSantis’ post, adding, “I agree with this. Just donated. More of us should. We must restore the rule of law in America.”

Despite the characterizations by DeSantis and the *Journal*, the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” has nothing to do with strangling the mentally ill, the hungry or the destitute. It is a Biblical allegory about an injured Jewish traveler being left for dead on the side of the road by his friends and saved by his so-called enemies. The Good Samaritan did not physically assault and lynch the injured and hungry traveler; he eased his suffering, tended his wounds and provided shelter, everything the homeless and hungry Neely was clearly in need of.

Like Kyle Rittenhouse and Ashli Babbitt, Penny is quickly becoming a victim for the far right. Last week, Georgia Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene called Penny a “hero,” while fellow “MAGA” Florida Republican Representative Matt Gaetz described Penny as the “Subway

Superman” on his social media account.

The defense of Penny by DeSantis, Gaetz and Greene follows Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott’s pledge last month to “swiftly” pardon US Army Sgt. Daniel Perry. The fascist and racist soldier was found guilty in a jury trial of murdering anti-police violence protester Garrett Foster during the 2020 mass demonstrations that followed the police murder of George Floyd.

The Republicans’ defense of vigilante killers, especially when their violence is targeted against minorities and left-wing individuals, is a warning to the working class of the continuing transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist movement. Under conditions where the entire ruling class, and its institutions, such as the police and the court system, are being exposed as instruments of class rule, the Republicans are elevating right-wing militias and vigilantes to be used as shock troops against the working class.

DeSantis’ embrace of Penny is especially notable given his current stature in the Republican Party. While he is currently trailing Trump in every primary poll, there is the distinct possibility Trump will be indicted on some of the numerous crimes he has committed, and DeSantis could become the presumptive front runner for the Republican nomination.

Speaking at a campaign-style rally in Sioux Center, Iowa, on Saturday, which was attended by Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Senator Joni Ernst, along with dozens of other local and state Republican politicians, DeSantis pitched himself to a roomful of Republicans as a “winner” unlike the “loser” Trump, whom he did not name.

“We must reject the culture of losing that has infected our party in recent years,” DeSantis declared. “The time for excuses is over ... if we provide a positive alternative for the future of this country, Republicans will win across the board.” DeSantis warned that if “we focused the election on the past, or other sides issues,” obliquely referring to Trump’s defense of his failed coup, “I think the Democrats will beat us again.”

As part of his pitch to Iowa Republicans, DeSantis mirrored Trump’s pitch in several respects. He attacked “illegal aliens” and transgender persons. Seeking to differentiate himself from Trump, DeSantis touted his military record, telling the audience, “I volunteered to serve in Iraq.”

While DeSantis touted his deployment to Iraq, he purposefully did not bring up his 2006 deployment to

Guantánamo Bay in Cuba because, for the second time in the last year, a detainee of the prison camp has come forward to accuse DeSantis of overseeing the torture program at the facility.

Last November in an interview in *EYES LEFT Podcast* with journalist and Iraq war veteran Mike Prysner, 14-year Guantánamo detainee Mansoor Adayfi revealed that DeSantis, who was a JAG lawyer in the Navy, oversaw the force-feeding and beating of inmates to break their hunger strikes. Adayfi recalled to Prysner that DeSantis was “one of the people that supervised the torture, the abuses, the beatings. All the time at Guantánamo.”

Adayfi said in the November 2022 interview, “I’m telling Americans: This guy is a torturer. He is a criminal. He was laughing. And he was there to ensure we were treated humanely.”

Last week, Prysner published another interview with a Guantánamo detainee, who was there while DeSantis was overseeing the force-feeding torture program. The detainee, who wished to be remain anonymous, told Prysner, “In 2006 I was tortured by the camp administration and medical staff until I passed out, I was taken to ICU as a result of the torture. Lieutenant DeSantis was one of the officers who oversaw the force-feeding and the torture we endured in 2006. He and other officers, translators, and interrogators would come to see us during the force feeding.

“He was with officers who mistreated us, tortured the prisoners who were on hunger strike, raided Camp 4 and closed it, assaulting the prisoners, beating them and shooting at them with rubber bullets,” the former prisoner added.

Corroborating the testimony given by Adayfi, the anonymous detainee recalled, “The worst of what I experienced while [DeSantis] was there was the torture by force-feeding and beating at the hands of the guards. He was looking at me like I was an animal. There was a lot of blood on my clothes and on the floor.”



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