

DeSantis, Trump compete over who is the bigger fascist

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Ex-president Donald Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis made competing fascist denunciations of socialism this week as each arrived in Iowa to campaign in the state that holds the first contest for the Republican presidential nomination.

In his first major media interview after formally declaring his candidacy last week, DeSantis told Fox News that he would “destroy leftism and socialism” if he won the presidency in 2024. He then took this message to Iowa, where he kicked off his campaign with a rally at the fundamentalist Eternity Church in Clive, a suburb of Des Moines.

The pastor of the church told the *New York Times* that choosing the church for the first DeSantis rally “tells me they value the Christian vote.” In welcoming DeSantis to the rally, he prayed for the candidate and his family and appealed for divine assistance in the “fight against globalism and socialism.”

Evangelical voters account for nearly two thirds of those participating in the Iowa Republican caucuses, which will be held in January or February next year. The exact date has not yet been set, but the tentative schedule means that the contest is as little as seven months away. Both ultra-right candidates have already begun spending vast sums on television advertising and the hiring of field workers in the state.

In his speech Tuesday, DeSantis claimed that “woke ideology” pushed by “elites” now dominated the US government and corporations, and hailed his own publicity-driven conflict in Florida with Walt Disney World over his attacks on gay, lesbian and transgender people. Striking an authoritarian pose, he declared, “It is time we imposed our will on Washington D.C.”

He criticized Trump, without mentioning his name, entirely from the right, particularly on COVID. He accused Trump of having capitulated to Dr. Anthony

Fauci in promoting mitigation measures, including masking and vaccination. He claimed that the state of Florida, under his leadership, had been a “freedom zone” during the pandemic, which was regarded as over and done with by both DeSantis and his audience, who were entirely unmasked, and many likely unvaccinated.

In effect, DeSantis was arguing that COVID-19 should have been permitted to kill even more Americans than the nearly 1.2 million who have died so far, and that deaths should continue to mount. That last is a point on which he has full agreement with the Biden administration, which last month scrapped all remaining mitigation measures along with the public health emergency.

DeSantis attacked Trump for rejecting a ban on abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy—when the majority of women do not even know they are pregnant—as in the bill just passed in Florida and signed by him into law. Trump supports a slightly less restrictive ban, 10 or 12 weeks, as well as exceptions for rape and incest.

At a press conference after the speech, the Florida governor added criticisms of Trump over his supporting and signing bipartisan legislation that reduced prison terms for some drug offenses. He called it “a jailbreak bill.”

But the central criticism made by DeSantis in his speech, his news conference and various media appearances was that Trump would lose the 2024 election, while he, supposedly, would be victorious. In his speech in Clive, after listing a series of fascist measures on which both candidates largely agree, he declared, “And you can’t do any of this if you don’t win.”

At his news conference, he presented himself as the

more publicly acceptable face of fascism, saying of Trump, “There are a lot of voters that just aren’t going to ever vote for him... We just have to accept that.” This is the closest DeSantis has come to admitting that the 2020 election was not stolen.

While DeSantis repeatedly boasted about his success in passing a raft of reactionary anti-democratic legislation in his state, largely focused on issues of race, gender and sexual orientation, he made no mention of the number of court decisions overturning or suspending these laws as violations of the First Amendment, which prohibits restrictions on speech and bars the establishment of religion by the government.

The Florida governor’s threat to “destroy leftism and socialism,” which he has reiterated in interviews over the past week, reveals the real driving force of all his right-wing ranting. He is giving voice to the mounting fear in the American ruling class of the developing radicalization among American workers and the danger that they are turning to Marxism and socialist revolution.

Trump expresses that same fear even more directly, and in all capital letters. His Memorial Day message to his followers on Truth Social, his own version of Twitter, concluded, “WE MUST STOP THE COMMUNISTS, MARXISTS AND FASCIST ‘PIGS’ AT EVERY TURN AND, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!”

Some political adviser no doubt counseled Trump to add “fascist” to his usual list of left-wing targets for invective, although he has the closest relations with fascist militias like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, who spearheaded the attack on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021.

After a fascist mob marched through Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, and one fascist killed a counter-protester by ramming his car into her, Trump declared that there were “very fine people” among them. He was referring to a crowd of neo-Nazis who marched with torches, chanting “Jews will not replace us!”

While DeSantis obsesses about gays and transgender people, Trump demonizes migrant workers. He declared Tuesday that one of his first actions if he regained the White House would be to issue an executive order against birthright citizenship—the provision of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution that declares anyone born in the United States to be a

citizen, including the children of undocumented immigrants.

That such an action would be, by definition, unconstitutional did not concern the former president. To the extent that he even bothers to consider that aspect of the issue, he is counting on the six-member right-wing majority on the Supreme Court, including three of his own appointees, to overturn the 125-year-old precedent, set in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, which established that birthright citizenship did not apply only to former slaves, but to the children of immigrants as well.

The Trump campaign issued a statement later saying that the executive order Trump envisions “will explain the clear meaning of the 14th Amendment,” that the previous precedent should be overturned and the children of “illegal” immigrants, born on US soil, should be denied citizenship and subject to deportation along with their parents.

Trump will follow DeSantis into Iowa, arriving Wednesday night and speaking Thursday at a breakfast meeting with ultra-right activists, followed by a town hall in Clive—the same suburb visited by the Florida governor—to be recorded by Fox News.



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