

Pence, Christie join growing list of Republican presidential candidates challenging Trump

Patrick Martin
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Former Vice President Mike Pence filed paperwork Monday marking his official entry into the campaign for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, and will make the public announcement at a campaign event Wednesday in Iowa, the state where the first contest in the primary campaign will be held.

Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, one of the most vociferous Republican critics of former President Donald Trump, is announcing his candidacy Tuesday, and former North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum will do so on Wednesday.

These three will join Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, IT multi-millionaire Vivek Ramaswamy, and talk-radio host Larry Elder, the Republican candidate for governor of California in 2022, bringing the total of “major” candidates (i.e., those so anointed by the corporate media and wealthy donors) to ten.

New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu announced Monday that he would not run for the presidency in 2024, and he said that most of the announced candidates should withdraw if they fail to win significant support in the polls soon, in order to avoid splitting the anti-Trump vote in Republican caucuses and primaries next year.

Seven of the ten, all but Trump, Christie and Burgum, spoke on the weekend at a cookout and motorcycle event sponsored by Senator Joni Ernst, the first large, multi-candidate event in the campaign for the Iowa caucus, now seven months away. The speeches, delivered to crowds of hundreds, underscored the further shift to the right in the Republican Party, where

only the two most fascistic candidates, Trump and DeSantis, are getting double-digit support among likely primary voters and caucus-goers. Most are largely unknown to the public and those that are well-known, like Pence and Christie, have little popular support.

None of the candidates made any mention of the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 by a mob of Trump supporters spearheaded by fascist militia groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers—except to condemn the ongoing prosecution of the attackers as a federal political witch-hunt. None of them condemned Trump for his claims of a “stolen election” or for his attempt to remain in the White House through violence. For the most part, they made no reference to Trump at all, while pledging to continue the ultra-right policies with which he is identified.

DeSantis focused largely on “culture war” issues like abortion and bans directed against discussion of sexual orientation in public schools, and against any treatment or accommodation for transgender youth. He denounced any form of mitigation against COVID-19, calling the limited shutdowns during the early stages of the pandemic and subsequent mask and vaccine mandates a “biomedical security state,” and implicitly blaming Trump for keeping Dr. Anthony Fauci as an adviser.

Haley made one of the most bizarre statements, attacking the transgendered, telling the audience that what she called “biological boys” playing sport against girls was “the greatest women’s issue of our time” and suggesting that the presence of a handful of transgender athletes in high school girls’ locker rooms was the cause of the colossal rise in suicidal thoughts and attempts among teenage girls.

Ramaswamy, whose fascistic campaign has been heavily promoted by the national media, claimed that the American population was suffering from a “void of purpose” which he proposed to fill. “When you have a black hole that runs that deep, that is when the poison fills the void,” he said. “It almost doesn’t matter what the poison is, woke-ism, transgenderism, climatism, COVID-ism, globalism...”

The sheer number of candidates suggests that the inevitability of Trump’s nomination—accepted as conventional wisdom in the corporate media and the Biden White House—is open to question in top circles in the Republican Party. This is not merely linked to the likelihood of his criminal prosecution over an array of charges, stemming from the effort to manipulate the 2020 election, the January 6 attack, and various cases arising from his personal and business life.

Trump, and to some extent DeSantis, has been out of step with a central concern of the financial oligarchy and its military-intelligence apparatus: successful prosecution of the war against Russia in Ukraine, leading to the overthrow of the regime in Moscow and the breakup of the country, making its immense natural resources available to direct exploitation by the imperialist powers.

Pence, Christie, Scott, Haley and the other candidates have all lined up with the war drive and given full-scale backing to the Ukrainian regime which is serving as the spearhead for imperialism. None of them focuses on the issue in their campaign appearances, well aware that there is little public support for the massive US involvement in the war, but they have given their assurances to the national security apparatus and the congressional war-hawks.

The Republican National Committee announced Friday new qualifying standards for candidates to become eligible to participate in the first presidential primary debate, to be broadcast from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 23 on Fox News. Most of the candidates are likely to meet the targets for fundraising and support in the polls, which is set at only one percent of likely Republican voters.

But in addition, the RNC is requiring candidates to sign a pledge to support the party’s eventual nominee if they fail to win the nomination themselves. This could well be modified, but in the past, Trump has ostentatiously rejected such “loyalty” pledges, always

leaving open the possibility of running as an independent candidate. Aides have also suggested that he may refuse to participate in debates altogether, in effect claiming the nomination as his by right, as the supposed victim of the “stolen election.”

What underlies the backroom maneuvers and the undiluted reactionary bilge being voiced by all the candidates is the steady transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist organization, whether it advances Trump as its candidate for Fuhrer or some alternative, such as DeSantis, posing as “more Catholic than the Pope.”



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