Opinion
NCR Voices



Left: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (OSV News/Reuters/Alyssa Pointer); right: Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards (OSV News/Courtesy of Office of the Governor/Marie Constantin)



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There is no clearer contrast between a morally depraved governor and a morally serious one than a comparison of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, both of whom are Catholic. DeSantis is a Republican and Edwards is a Democrat.

DeSantis recently signed a six-week ban on abortion, lowering the limit from 15 weeks. All GOP candidates are trying to figure out how to navigate the post-*Dobbs* political waters on the issue, and it is remarkable that former President Donald Trump has so far been silent on DeSantis' six-week ban. Being the "most pro-life" candidate might help in a GOP primary but it could also prove problematic in a general election.

At the same time, DeSantis pushed a bill through the Florida legislature that would make it easier to execute criminals, eliminating the requirement that a jury verdict to impose the death penalty be unanimous. Currently, Alabama is the only state that permits a non-unanimous verdict to send someone to death row.

The Florida governor has framed the change as necessitated by the failure of a jury to impose the death penalty on Nikolas Cruz, the convicted killer at the Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting in Parkland. One wishes the governor would be as concerned to change the law on gun access in the wake of that event as to change the ease with which capital punishment can be applied.

> How much more credible would Ron DeSantis' commitment to protecting human life be if he were willing to defend it at all times and in all situations?
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DeSantis is also trying to allow the death penalty for people found guilty of raping a child. How to oppose such a proposal without appearing like you are defending child rapists?

It is easy to see how being tough on crime will help a candidate in a GOP primary. But it is also easy for anyone the least bit capable of rising above partisan orthodoxies to see the moral inconsistency in DeSantis's pro-life pretensions. How much more credible would his commitment to protecting human life be if he were willing to defend it at all times and in all situations?

With DeSantis, however, inconsistency is less important than appearing tough. He demonstrates a consistent abhorrence to human sympathy, and is quite willing to sacrifice other vital values in pursuit of consistent cruelty. This month he also proposed legislation that would criminalize efforts to help undocumented migrants, a proposal that would run roughshod over the religious liberty protections of the Catholic Church's many ministries that assist migrants.

"The sponsors of this bill want to take out their frustrations on the migrants with various punitive measures that unfairly demonize them and gratuitously seek to make their lives even more difficult," Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski said of the proposals. "Theirs and our frustrations could more productively be directed towards Washington by urging Congress to address much needed immigration reform."

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This was not DeSantis's first effort at dehumanizing migrants. Last year, he flew 50 migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard. He claimed the wealthy inhabitants of the island "deported" the migrants to the mainland, a claim that was disproven by independent fact-checkers. The whole episode was a publicity stunt.

Reducing desperate people to props in a campaign event is really cruel. Evidently the lives of migrants don't count when the Florida governor burnishes his pro-life credentials.

Compare that with the situation in Louisiana. Edwards, who signed a six-week abortion ban last year, used his final State of the State address to call on the legislature of his conservative state to repeal the death penalty. "It doesn't deter

crime; it isn't necessary for public safety; and more importantly, it is wholly inconsistent with Louisiana's pro-life values as it quite literally promotes a culture of death," Edwards told the legislators in Baton Rouge.

As far as I know, there is no other governor in the entire country as morally consistent on the issue of life as Edwards, which is a sad comment on the state of our political life.

> John Bel Edwards is the most 'whole life' politician in America.
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The Louisiana governor also called on the legislators to ask themselves what else being pro-life should entail.

"One thing we can all agree on is that Louisiana is a pro-life state. ... But we have to ask ourselves what does that mean?" Edwards asked. "Do the policies we've enacted support the position we've taken? Do we truly support families? What does it mean if we let mothers and fathers work full time without being able to afford to feed and house their children?"

Edwards asked for paid family and medical leave for parents, and for an equal pay law to raise the wages of women who remain discriminated against in the workplace. He defended his expansion of Medicaid in the state, which has provided basic health care to half a million working poor citizens, a move he called "the easiest big decision I made as governor." Edwards is the most "whole life" politician in America.

Edwards concluded his speech by quoting from his "favorite" scriptural passage, Matthew 25. "I have strived to be a Matthew 25 governor," he said.

DeSantis might ask: "Matthew 25? Who's Matthew?" Edwards embraces the consistent ethic of life. DeSantis promotes a consistent ethic of cruelty.