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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis smiles in Tokyo, Japan, April 24, during an international trade missi

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis smiles in Tokyo, Japan, April 24, during an international trade mission. (OSV News/Kimimasa Mayama, pool via Reuters)



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May 26, 2023
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It's official: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has thrown his Mickey Mouse ears into the 2024 Republican presidential nominating contest. Given his landslide victory in last year's gubernatorial contest in the nation's third-largest state, no one can dub DeSantis a Cinderella candidate, but it remains doubtful he can topple the GOP's Musafa, Donald Trump. There is something a little dopey about DeSantis, to be sure, but Trump's grumpy demeanor has not worn well either.

The anticipation was killing precisely no one. Still, DeSantis gets points for coming up with an innovative way to declare his candidacy, in an online Twitter discussion with the social media platform's CEO Elon Musk. It shows a deft political touch on DeSantis' part to make his major announcement next to the one person who is undeniably more obnoxiously vulgar, and vulgarly obnoxious, than the governor himself.

Or, it would have displayed a deft political touch if the announcement had not been a 21-minute technical meltdown. The man who wants to be leader of the free world couldn't organize a Twitter conversation. Oh, my.

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The campaign announcement was intended to help DeSantis replace headlines about his feud with his archnemesis of late, Disney. With school finishing, millions of American families will be descending on Orlando to visit the Magic Kingdom, and perhaps DeSantis recognized that fighting with the iconic theme park's company was not a good look. But even in the slick campaign video he released Wednesday, after listing a host of socio-cultural problems, he claimed President Joe Biden, in the face of these problems, "flounders." Was this a none-too-subtle reference to the controversy over the live-action remake of "The Little Mermaid," and concerns the character Flounder is a little too real-looking? Is the very concept of "too real" something GOP primary voters can wrap their heads around?

The governor has also made headlines for his campaign against wokeism. "Florida is where woke goes to die" was one of the best applause lines in his victory speech last year. There is little doubt that many Democrats, especially the young people who play a disproportionately large role in running campaigns, are insufferably woke, as I discussed last week. It should be a winning issue for the GOP.

However, so far from responding to his political opponents' foolishness with the kind of "common sense" policies he called for in his announcement video, DeSantis chose to strike one of the ugliest of America's recessive cultural genes: censorship. Efforts to take over school boards and hand control of the curriculum to modern-day Cotton Mathers did not go so well in large swaths of this country during municipal elections earlier this year.

Xenophobia is another of America's nastier recessive genes, and one that Trump rejuvenated as part of his toxic populism. Xenophobia is now part of the integral human degeneration of the Republican Party, and DeSantis is only too happy to champion the cause. Last year, in a grotesque publicity stunt, he flew migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard, a wealthy enclave in Massachusetts. The dehumanizing of desperate people to make a political point was horrific.

Also hypocritical. Genealogist Megan Smolenyak discovered that DeSantis' great-great-grandmother would likely be barred from entry to the U.S. if the laws then were akin to those DeSantis advocates today. Luigia Colucci was almost barred anyway: The illiterate Italian peasant entered the U.S. just before a literacy requirement for entry went into force. "Many of the people I research are beneficiaries of an immigration system that was kind of flexible and forgave little mistakes," Smolenyak told the Tampa Bay Times. "If anything you would think they would be a little more compassionate." If anything.



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, left, speaks alongside President Donald Trump during a roundtable discussion on the coronavirus outbreak and storm preparedness at Pelican Golf Club in Belleair, Florida, July 31, 2020. Before Trump and DeSantis were leading rivals for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, they were allies. (AP file/Patrick Semansky)

DeSantis claims, rightly at times, that others use the teaching of history to indoctrinate students into a worldview not necessarily supported by historiographical

research. The charge can be laid at his feet, too: How do you explain American history, our country's continued ability to renew itself, without placing migration front and center in that story of American renewal?

Is DeSantis Catholic? At America magazine, my colleague Michael O'Loughlin looked at the ambiguity surrounding the governor's religious practice. The governor's religious practice, or lack thereof, will not make a whit of difference politically. Liberal Catholics will call him out over his failure to abide by Catholic social doctrine just as conservative Catholics call out Biden for his failure to abide by Catholic teaching about the sanctity of human life. Voters, like politicians, now see the world mostly through the lens of partisanship and only sometimes through the lens of faith.

DeSantis has already lost the first primary in a presidential nominating contest: The media loathe him. As Jack Shafer observes at Politico, DeSantis is "a man of many straightjackets." In a line that wins the prize for most brutal takedown by a columnist so far this year, Shafer writes: "[DeSantis] looks and acts like the guy who would confiscate the ball kicked accidentally onto his lawn by kids playing on the sidewalk."

Can DeSantis beat Trump? The former president's legal troubles may yet derail his candidacy, but DeSantis won't. And the bad blood that has emerged between the two men means Trump would likely look to someone else as his heir should the need arise. The governor whose impressive reelection victory propelled him into the spotlight is not ready for the spotlight. The man whose resume shouts "person on the rise" and who is less than the sum of his parts, not more. Watching him, I am reminded of the words in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* that the character Julia Flyte applied to her husband Rex Mottram after their separation:

> You know Father Mowbray hit on the truth about Rex at once, that it took me a year of marriage to see. He simply wasn't all there. He wasn't a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed; something in a bottle, an organ kept alive in the laboratory. I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of a man pretending he was the whole.