

When the Cookie Crumbled: The Ron DeSantis Campaign Ends

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So much for that. Much had been promised by Florida Governor Ron De Santis to derail Donald Trump's bid to return to the White House. But the attempt to wrest the Republican Party from the orange ogre's meaty, waving hands was never convincing. In the end, DeSantis was more stumbler than balancer, a woeful mismatch before the forces he never staved off.

While he made his name fluorescent bright in Florida's politics, launching attacks on Disney, skirmishing with public health officials regarding pandemic measures, and railing against minorities (LGBTQ youth figured highly), he seemed awkward away from the swamp. On the national stage, Trump was to DeSantis what the boulder was to Sisyphus, having to be constantly pushed, a crushing, seemingly perennial burden. But to win the nomination, let alone have any prospect of a shot at the White House, DeSantis had to extricate himself from that task without anybody else noticing.

He did so in a myriad of ways, none successful. One particularly shallow effort involved DeSantis's attempt to woo the right-wing of the Twitter/X-sphere, going so far as to [invite social media figures](#) (one dare not call them personalities) in January 2022 to Tallahassee for a package visit. The agenda: a pop in to the governor's office, dinner at the gubernatorial mansion, topped off with drinks at a rooftop bar near Florida's state house. Many of the feted bloviators had recently made the move to Florida, where they could bask in freedom's airy glory.

This all looked like an effort to sketch a separate agenda, bringing out the paving for his own way to the White House. But DeSantis's reasons for wading into that particular echo chamber were unmistakable: Trump was going off him, and the emotionally distant DeSantis was not one to press the flesh with enthusiasm. (His social circle, it [had been said](#), was so small it "could fit the back seat of a Mini Cooper.") Cornered, and not willing to go for such

savoury electoral items as the economy, DeSantis chose culture of the most “Right” sort. The governor’s press secretary, Christina Pushaw, [told Politico](#) that the tactics were not out of the ordinary. “Turns out that a governor who stands up for individual rights against federal tyranny is popular among conservatives.”

Whatever Pushaw’s view on this, conservative commentators could not but notice the heavy reliance on digital campaigning as the be-all and end-all. Jack Butler of the *National Review Online* [was sceptical](#) from the start. “An essential element of its emerging strategy appears to be rooted in the belief that Twitter is not merely a means to disseminate information and messaging produced elsewhere, but an essential political background itself – a digital Iowa, New Hampshire, or South Carolina.” It was his effort to seek the “Terminally Online aura” that captured such figures as Blake Masters in 2022 or Elizabeth Warren in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary.

And terminal it proved to be. The DeSantis campaign was chaotic, controversial without constructive return, fatally weak, and inclined to needlessly sap resources. It also started late, enabling Trump to gather steam and mount his own offensive against “Meatball Ron” and “Ron DeSanctimonious”.

The mounting legal challenges for the former president were also failing to shrink his popularity. Each indictment and charge came with an invigorating effect. The May 2023 launch by the Florida governor also began in ominous fashion, with DeSantis choosing the venue as Twitter Spaces, with his facilitator being the erratic billionaire Elon Musk. By controlling access and the message through the audio-format, the governor could eschew meeting actual human beings.

As it transpired, the site creaked and glitched. It took almost half-an-hour of technical problems before DeSantis took off. Even then, his presentation, delivered to a significantly smaller online audience, [could not resist](#) the digital aura. “I think what was done with Twitter was really significant for the future of our country.”

Described once by Trump as a “brilliant cookie”, the crumbling DeSantis saw the dark writing on the electoral wall after the results of the Iowa caucus. The January 15 outcome did place him second on the returns at 21.2%, ahead of Nikki Haley at 19.1%, suggesting that the campaign would continue into New Hampshire and South Carolina.

It was not to be. Rather than risk further defeat and likely humiliation, DeSantis suspended his campaign. Inevitably, the announcement came on the platform now known as X. He declared that there was “no clear path to victory.” Like many politicians in the US, he [could not resist relying](#) on words supposedly uttered by Britain’s wartime leader, Winston Churchill, and making a hash of it: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

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– Winston Churchill pic.twitter.com/ECor8YeiMm

— Ron DeSantis (@RonDeSantis) [January 21, 2024](#)

Churchill never said anything of the sort, though [he did write](#) that, “No one can guarantee success in war, but only deserve it” and that, “Success always demands a greater effort”. Both quotes appear in the 1949 publication *Their Finest Hour*. DeSantis, it would seem, had [used the words](#) of a Budweiser advertisement from 1938, rather appropriate given the watery quality of that beverage, and the governor’s weak, haphazard effort.

The Republican candidate, branded Trump 2.0 or “Trump without the baggage”, is no more. And just to sweeten matters for the man whose hold on the Republicans he could not break, DeSantis gave his own endorsement. It leaves Trump in a near unassailable position, with Haley’s purportedly more modest bid more vulnerable and quixotic than ever.

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