



Life In Brief

Current Title: Governor

Political Party: Republican Party

Born: September 14, 1978

Birthplace: Jacksonville, FL

Religion: Roman Catholic

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Marital Status: Married

Education:

- Yale University (CT), AB, 2001
- Harvard Law School (MA), JD, 2005

Family:

3 children

Work History:

- JAG Officer, U.S. Navy, 2004-2010
- Military Prosecutor, Trial Service Office Command South East, Naval Station Mayport, FL, 2005
- Lieutenant, Joint Task Force-Guantanamo, Office of the Commander, Guantanamo Bay Joint Detention Facility, 2006-2007
- Legal Advisor to the SEAL Commander, Special Operations Task Force-West, Naval Special Warfare Command Group, SEAL Team One, Coronado, CA, 2007-2008
- Federal Prosecutor, Special Assistant U.S. Attorney, Criminal Division, Naval Region Southeast Legal Service, 2008-2009
- Trial Defense Attorney, Naval Region Southeast Legal Service, 2009-2010
- JAG Officer, U.S. Navy Reserve, 2010-CURR

- Lecturer on the Law of War, Florida Coastal School of Law

Quick Summary

Tea Party firebrand who was elected to Congress as a party loyal deficit hawk; focuses on strategic relationship building as governor

- Co-founder of the House Freedom Caucus who rode into office on Tea Party wave campaigning hard against government spending
- Frequently utilized national news outlets in Congress to criticize the Obama Administration and build a public profile
- Rocketed to frontrunner in the gubernatorial Republican primary after receiving an endorsement from President Trump
- Signaled a clear departure from the previous administration, canceling over 200 appointments by Rick Scott and taking a more collaborative approach with state lawmakers to pass big agenda items
- Criticized for not pushing more extensive social distancing measures on public beaches in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic

Approach and Motivations

Utilizes support from President Trump to bolster electoral strength while implementing a collaborative approach to push policy

- President Trump's endorsement secured a win over the establishment-backed candidate in the GOP primary for governor, where DeSantis fully embraced Trump's agenda on immigration
- Deliberate about building strong ties within the state legislature and sees the value in building long-term relationships to pass controversial policies like private school vouchers and a "sanctuary cities" bill



Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Policies embody conservative fiscal and immigration policy

Government Spending: *Championed Tea Party effort to curb spending in Congress but has been open to increases as governor*

- Declined congressional pension and health insurance; introduced bill to fully eliminate Congressional retirement pensions, claiming it to be inappropriate to spend tax dollars on
- Advocated for permanent earmark ban in House, claiming they were wasteful government spending that amounted to “buying votes”

National Security & Immigration: *Views shaped by military service*

- Served in Guantanamo Bay and has consistently opposed shutting down the prison, arguing it would bring terrorists on to U.S. soil
- Pushed statewide E-Verify mandate
- Campaigned heavily on banning “Sanctuary Cities” in Florida and, as governor, was personally involved in whipping votes to ensure passage

Everglades Restoration: *Pursued an ambitious agenda immediately after taking office*

- Downplayed the threat of climate change on the gubernatorial campaign trail
- As governor, he has pushed to increase government funding to protect the Everglades and stymie effects of climate change

Education: *Priority early in his gubernatorial tenure*

- Chose a staunch school choice advocate to head Florida’s education department and worked with the legislature to create a new voucher program
- Ended Common Core in Florida and replaced with Florida-specific standards, B.E.S.T. (Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking), which eliminate standardized testing and incorporate civics into the curriculum

Core Communities

Maintains influential political networks in Florida and nationally

Cuban Americans: *Core constituency that helped him secure the governor’s office*

- Received critical endorsement from prominent Cuban Speaker of the House, Jose Oliva, as an underdog in 2018 gubernatorial race
- Chose Cuban-American Jeanette Nunez to be his running mate, the first female Cuban lieutenant governor
- Secured more than double the number of Cuban votes than his opponent in 2018 gubernatorial election

Florida Legislators: *Sees relationships key to legislative victories*

- Takes an active role in whipping votes, including Sen. Tom Lee (R-FL) on “sanctuary cities” legislation
- Supported push by the legislature to restructure state process to allocate teacher pay raises, earning praise from Sen. Bill Montford (D)
- Makes efforts to learn about lawmakers and their individual districts, notably Rep. Al Jacquet (D) and Rep. Daniel Perez (R)



Trump & Tea Party-Aligned Network: *Early institutional support that remains intact today*

- Donald Trump expressed support for his congressional candidacy early-on in 2012 on twitter
- Endorsed by former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio in 2012, who would later be pardoned by President Trump
- One of President Trump’s strongest supporters in the House, Rep. Matt Gaetz, helped lead DeSantis’s transition team in 2018

Political History

- Vice Chair, U.S. House Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Job Creation and Regulatory Affairs, 2013-2015
- Vice Chair, U.S. House Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice, 2015-CURR
- Chairman, U.S. House Subcommittee on National Security, 2015-CURR
- Member (FL06 R), U.S. House of Representatives, 2012-2018

Relevant Financial Information

Deep network of wealthy conservative donors

Biggest Industry Donors (Congressional Career)

- Republican/Conservative Groups: \$766,000
- Securities & Investments: \$427,000
- Real Estate: \$336,000
- Health Professionals: \$230,000
- Insurance: \$207,000

Biggest Corporate Donors (Congressional Career)

- Brown & Brown Insurance (Daytona Beach, FL): \$59,000
- Island Doctors (St. Augustine, FL): \$50,000

- Holland & Knight (Miami, FL): \$44,300
- Swisher International (Jacksonville, FL): \$36,000
- Total Military Management (Jacksonville, FL):\$36,000

Biggest Individual Donors (2018 gubernatorial campaign)

- Richard Uihlein, Founder of Uline Company (Lake Forest, IL): \$750,000
- Keith Wold, attorney and developer (Boca Raton, FL): \$500,000
- Frederick Sontag, Founder of the Spring Bay Companies (Ponte Vedra Beach, FL): \$500,000
- Kenneth C. Griffin, Founder and CEO of Citadel LLC (Chicago, IL): \$500,000
- John W. Childs, Founder and CEO of J.W. Childs Associates (Waltham, MA): \$400,000

Publications, Media and Speaking

A frequent guest on national cable news while in Congress, but has pivoted to more local publications as governor

Publications: *Published book in response to President Obama’s first book*

- Favorite Subjects: Conservatism
- Bibliography
- Dreams from Our Founding Fathers
- Dreams from Our Founding Fathers

Media: *Several appearances on the national conservative news circuit during his gubernatorial election*

- National: frequented national media prior to being elected governorPreferred Outlets:



Conservative-leaning outlets like Fox News, Washington Examiner, and National Review
Favorite Subjects: Mueller Investigation, immigration enforcement, federal spending

- Local

Preferred Outlets: National cable news like CNN; conservative outlets like the Daily Caller
Favorite Subjects: i.e. gun control, the opioid crisis, etc.

- Tends to avoid media inquiries as governor
- Preferred Outlets: Conservative-leaning outlets like Fox News, Washington Examiner, and National Review
- Favorite Subjects: Mueller Investigation, immigration enforcement, federal spending
- Preferred Outlets: National cable news like CNN; conservative outlets like the Daily Caller
- Favorite Subjects: i.e. gun control, the opioid crisis, etc.

Professional Affiliations

- Member, Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Member, American Legion

Awards

- Iraq Campaign Medal
- Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal
- Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (gold star in lieu of second award)
- Bronze Star Medal (service)

Family and Personal Background

Skilled baseball player and Florida native

- Grew up in middle-class portion of Dunedin

- Father Ronald installed television ratings devices for Nielsen
- Married to Casey DeSantis (nee Black), an Emmy award-winning television host who previously hosted the show First Coast Living

Hobbies

- Excelled at baseball growing up and made it to the Final Four of the 1991 Little League World Series playing for a team from Dunedin

Criticisms and Controversies

Immigration views have caused conflict with the business community

Clashes with business groups over immigration policy in Florida

- Criticized by the Florida Chamber of Commerce for pushing E-Verify, accusing the policy of being unconstitutional and expensive
- The conflict set up potential issues with the Republicans in the legislature, who depend heavily on business groups for campaign finance

COVID-19 Response

Initially hesitant to implement social distancing measures to stymy the spread of COVID-19 in Florida

Actions: Gradual implementation of closures and restrictions on gatherings

- Directed State Surgeon General to declare public health emergency March 1 after two cases were confirmed, but he was initially hesitant to impose restrictions on businesses and schools



- Declared state of emergency on March 9
- Placed limits on nursing home and assisted living facility visitations
- On March 17, ordered bars and nightclubs closed for 30 days and schools closed through April 15 but did not close beaches and restaurants
- Ordered all restaurants to switch to take-out and delivery on March 20
- On March 23, instituted 14-day self-isolation rule for anyone flying from New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut to Florida
- Issued statewide state-at-home order on April 1
- Announced on April 21 that Florida had flattened their curve on COVID-19 spread and that the state was past the point of overwhelming hospitals with COVID-19 patients
- In a press briefing in late March, President Trump expressed admiration for DeSantis's response to COVID-19; Vice President Pence said DeSantis took decisive steps early on

Messaging: *Aligns himself with guidance coming from White House while proceeding with caution to re-open*

- Originally stated that the risk of contracting COVID-19 was low for residents of Florida and downplayed the threat of the virus with younger people, suggesting that the flu was more dangerous
- Has largely aligned himself with the messaging from the Trump Administration, saying that the state's response would be guided by the taskforce's suggestions
- DeSantis said the first phase of his re-opening approach would be slow and cautious

Public Reception: *Accused of not taking virus seriously enough locally but praised by the president*

- Criticized by local press for waiting too long to institute strong social distancing measures, including not closing down the state's beaches for spring break in March