

Family Research Council

Pray Vote Stand Summit

Remarks by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (R)

Speaker:

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (R)

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(Music, applause.)

FLORIDA GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS (R): Well, thank you, Tony. And greetings from the free state of Florida! (Cheers, applause.)

I want to thank Tony and the team, for everybody at the Family Research Council for all the hard work that they are putting into defending our freedoms.

To all the pastors in the room, you are the shepherds of God's flock. I want to thank you for all that you're doing to restore our country to where it deserves to be.

As I've traveled across not only just Florida but across the country, I'm sometimes asked about the role that faith plays in my leadership as governor. And you know, I can only tell you from me and what it's like being in a – in a high office, I don't know how you could be a leader without having faith in God. (Applause.)

When you stand up for what's right in this day and age, that is not going to be cost-free. You are going to face blowback. You're going to face attacks. You're going to face smears. And it's the faith in God that gives you the strength to stand firm against the lies, against the deceit, against the opposition. It gives you the foundation to know that all the insults, all the nonsense they throw at you ultimately doesn't matter because you are aiming higher.

Some people ask me: How do you become a good leader? Well, one of the first things you need to do is put on the full armor of God. (Cheers, applause.)

And I can also tell you this about the faith – the role that faith's played in my life and my family's life. My wife, Casey, a couple years ago was diagnosed with breast cancer. And at the time – we now have 6-, 5-, and 3-year-old kids at home, but at the time it was four, three, and one. And you never want to see anything like this happen, but it's certainly something that is even more tragic when you have a mother of very young kids.

And so we got the diagnosis. Very difficult. You don't know what's going to happen. There's fear. You look at the kids and wonder whether they're going to have a mother or not. And it was tough for me; it was really tough for my wife.

When we went public with the diagnosis because we felt we had an obligation to do it, we received prayers from people all across the United States. And we were able to witness firsthand the power of prayer as that lifted her spirits and put her on the road to a full and complete recovery. (Applause.) So thank you for what you did to support her. (Applause.)

Our country is in a state of decline. This is not a decline that is inevitable. This decline is a choice. This is a decline – this is a choice we're going to make as Americans over the next weeks, months, and years. And it's not going to be enough to just simply manage the decline a little bit better than the people that are currently in power. No, we as Americans must step up to the plate and reverse the decline of our country. (Applause.)

And you see it everywhere you look. We now live in a country where families that are doing everything right – working hard, trying to put food on the table for their kids – suddenly have to choose between getting groceries and buying gas. They can't afford a new house or a new car because of the rising prices and the inflation. And that has been inflicted on this country by the people in Washington, D.C., borrowing and spending this country into oblivion. (Applause.)

Inflation is robbing families of the American Dream. And, of course, as they borrow, print, and spend, the elites in Washington can't even control the territorial integrity of our country. We have an open southern border that is causing millions and millions of people to flood in, allowing fentanyl to infect our cities, and causing the deaths of over 100,000 Americans each and every year. It is humiliating to see, and it is tragic the consequences. Every town now has become a border town.

We see American cities that are falling apart because of high crime. We see weaponized government going after parents who are taking – going to a school-board meeting, or faith leaders who are engaging in pro-life activism. We see the signs of decline throughout communities, throughout institutions, and throughout the federal government.

But we also have a deeper issue than just the political issues that we face as Americans, because we do have a spiritual decline in this country. We just came off, a few years ago, where there were government elected officials forcibly closing churches and denying people their right to worship as they see fit. Meanwhile, the liquor stores were open. The strip clubs were open. But yet they slammed the door shut on people of faith. Not in the state of Florida. We didn't do that. We protected your right. (Cheers, applause.)

We also see the decline in children's classrooms, in corporate boardrooms, and, of course, in the machinations of the people who inhabit the United States Congress. We see the sense of becoming unmoored from our traditions, faith, and even common sense itself. It seems at times that there's nothing sacred anymore and that the virtues we all celebrated even a short time ago are now being tossed aside.

I believe that reviving the spirit of America is essential to helping reverse America's decline. And this revival is going to begin in our religious institutions, our places of work, each of our households, all the institutions that make up the bedrock of society.

So we're confronted now with threats to religious liberty the likes we have not seen through most of American history. And there was a time when we were told, you know, religious liberty is just simply – if you can go to church for that one hour every Sunday and pray the way you see fit, that somehow that is religious freedom. But the minute you try to bring that outside of that Sunday-morning context, well, then, the elites in our society are going to drop the hammer on that. And they basically want you to know their role.

Now, that is a bargain that has not worked for American society. We need people to be able to live their faith in all aspects of their life, not just on Sunday morning, as important as that is. (Applause.)

And so faith has been treated as secondary to secular concerns in culture, and attempts have been made to wipe our Judeo-Christian religious symbols from our national heritage and national culture.

The left, you know, they talk about saying you can't be involved in religious practice if you're in government because it would represent a, quote, establishment of religion. First of all, that's not true. But second of all, they're the ones that want to establish a religion. They just don't want to establish traditional religions; they want political leftism to be the established religion of this country. And what that means is, is that everybody else who's practicing their faith, that they want you to only be able to do that up until the point it conflicts with their agenda.

That's why you have instances like Coach Kennedy in Washington state. He just wanted to say a prayer at midfield after a high school football game, and he lost his job as a result of doing that. Had to go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and fortunately won a six to three victory that people hailed. (Applause.) And it was hailed as a victory for religious liberty, but I would submit to you the fact that that even had to go to the U.S. Supreme Court shows us that religious liberty is not flourishing the way it should in our country.

We saw the 303 Creative case, where by 6-3 they said government can't compel speech that violates the business owner's conscience. Those three liberal justices that voted against that, they wanted the speech compelled. But here's the problem: If that was conservative speech that was being compelled against a liberal business owner, those three liberal justices would have ruled the other way. So how can you justify that? Well, because they view leftism as the defining creed of this country, and they view your right to practice your faith as limited by their ambitions.

And that turns the founding of this country on its head. George Washington, our first and greatest president, he, early in his administration, got a letter from a rabbi at the Hebrew congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, thanking President Washington for having a country where they could practice their faith freely. And Washington wrote back, and he remarked something to the effect of how great it was to live in a country where your right to practice your faith is not something that's given to you and simply tolerated by political elites; it is something that is endowed to you by the hand of almighty God. (Cheers, applause.)

So the left in this country wants us to return to that pre-constitutional era where religion is merely tolerated but it's not allowed to flourish. And so the battle lines are we must win the fight to restore religious freedom as the Founding Fathers of this country intended it to flourish in the United States. (Applause.)

And this is not just academic. We have seen instances in recent years where government targets places once considered safe havens, like churches and like religious organizations – whether it's the left trying to force the Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva University to adopt a woke

agenda against their will; whether it's secular bureaucrats abusing their power and acting as the arbiters of faith in this country, deciding which organizations are religious enough for them to, quote, "deserve protection" and which are not; or state governments weaponizing their power against religious expression. This can no longer go on in these United States of America, and we're going to do something about it. (Applause.)

So as your president, I'm going to get to work on restoring full religious freedom in this country. First step is to ensure that we nominate and place constitutionalist judges on the courts of appeal and on the U.S. Supreme Court. (Applause.) My nominees will reflect the jurisprudence of justices like Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito Jr. – (cheers) – the two greatest justices on the court. (Applause.)

We will also in our administration end once and for all religious discrimination. We are going to tear up all government regulations that force groups to choose between government funding and their faith. (Cheers, applause.) Instead, we're going to actively incorporate the faith community into our administration.

That's what we've done in Florida. My wife Casey launched Hope Florida, where people that need government assistance are able to go to a government bureau, but instead of being dependent on a government check they get to sign up to a care portal that has all religious institutions – our churches and our synagogues – plugged in and can offer support as is necessary. And you know what's happened in a very short time in the program? They've been able to take 6,200 mostly poor women who are trying to raise children off of government assistance entirely. (Cheers, applause.) They are now with the churches and with our community groups. (Cheers, applause.) So we will make sure that the faith community has a seat at the table as we work to do the business of this country.

We will also do what we've done in Florida. We have universal school choice in the state of Florida and we need it nationwide. (Cheers, applause.) On day one, we'll issue an executive order that ensures funding available to private nonreligious schools must also be available to private faith-based schools. (Applause.)

We will stop the federal government from targeting men and women on the basis of their faith. Religious schools should not be pressured to violate the tenets of their faith. There will never be a question about whether a faith-based charity that serves the poor deserves First Amendment protections. We will seek the repeal of the Johnson amendment, which suppresses the speech of our religious leaders. (Cheers, applause.)

303 Creative and Masterpiece Cakeshop shouldn't have even gone to court, and so what we'll recognize is our laws need to prevent the litigation in the first place. Oftentimes, the process itself is the punishment. Those days are going to be over where you can be harassed on the basis of your faith. (Cheers, applause.)

In short, you will be free as believers, as Christians, as Jews, as everybody who's of faith. You will be free to worship and live out your faith in this country, period. (Applause.)

We will also ensure that the Judeo-Christian tradition and values that our nation was founded on are respected and are preserved. We're going to create divisions of conscience and religious freedom in the Departments of Education, Labor, and HHS to protect religious liberty across all agencies of government. Religious expression is a fundamental civil right. (Cheers, applause.)

We will ensure that any accommodation given for a secular purpose must also be extended to those who have religious motivations. And I will clarify that whenever sex and gender appear in a government document, we refer to the only two sexes that actually exist. (Cheers, applause.)

Finally, I will bring something that's long overdue to this town and this government, accountability. Even when God-fearing citizens have won in court, they have been forced to go through the time-consuming and invasive processes. My Department of Justice will investigate and prosecute attacks on faith-based pregnancy crisis centers and pro-life activists which the Biden administration is currently ignoring, and they're letting this go on. If government suits targeting faith communities are dismissed in court, there will be consequences against those who brought them. And believe me, we will support quickly dismissing these meritless lawsuits. When my administration goes to court it will be to defend religious freedom, not to attack religious freedom. (Cheers, applause.)

Now, all this is fine and good. But I think the question is, is, you know, we've heard a lot of people often promise things and then underdeliver on those promises. That's pretty much almost anyone that runs for office, except for us in the state of Florida. Everything we promised we would do we delivered on. In fact, we overdelivered on our promises. And Florida has led the way on issue after issue.

When the world went mad during COVID, when common sense suddenly became an uncommon virtue, Florida stood strong as a citadel of freedom and a refuge of sanity. We protected our religious institutions when so many states were running roughshod over people's right to practice their faith.

In Florida, we have universal school choice and we have held the teachers unions accountable for their misconduct. (Cheers, applause.) We now have scholarships of \$8,000 per child, and that includes all religious education. Other states that have school choice exclude religious schools from these scholarship programs. Not the state of Florida.

We have also stood up to protect the culture of life by enacting the strongest pro-life protections in the modern history of Florida, the Heartbeat Protection Act. (Cheers, applause.)

We have stood up – look, I'm a father of a 6-year-old daughter, a 5-year-old son and a 3-year-old daughter, and they all like to do different things. I want my girls to be able to participate in sports, if they want, with honor and integrity and fairness. And to that end, we signed legislation protecting women's athletics from having men and boys injected into the competition. It's wrong. It's unfair. (Cheers, applause.)

We have stood up against the gruesome practice of giving minors puberty blockers and gender surgeries. We have outlawed the practice in the state of Florida. It is mutilation. It is wrong, and it has no place in a free and just society. (Cheers, applause.)

We have stood for the rights of parents by prohibiting the injection of gender ideology in our schools, particularly our elementary schools. It is wrong to tell a second grader that the student may be born in the wrong body or can change their gender. It is not true. It is not appropriate. And if I have to stand up to the biggest, baddest companies like Disney to be able to protect our kids – (cheers) – you can count on me to do what is right. (Cheers, applause.)

And these Republicans out there who side with woke companies like Disney against the children of the state of Florida are wrong. And we need to make sure that they know that they are wrong. We are not going to let these big companies run roughshod over the education of our children, not on my watch. We will stand up and do the right thing. (Cheers, applause.)

We are also the first state to prevent teachers from forcing students to identify their pronouns. We're not doing the pronoun Olympics in the state of Florida. (Cheers, applause.)

We have ensured that our bathrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms are safe places for our girls and for our women, the way it was always intended to be. (Cheers, applause.)

And Tony mentioned in the introduction the woke mind virus represents a war on truth. So in Florida we have waged a war on woke. Do not tell me that a man can become a woman. Do not tell me that a man can get pregnant and expect me to accept that. I will not, because it is not true. And our society must be rooted in truth. The truth will set you free. (Cheers, applause.)

We made woke – Florida the place where woke goes to die. And I can promise you this. As president, we are going to leave the woke mind virus in the dustbin of history, where it belongs, once and for all. (Cheers, applause.)

When I ran for governor, I promised to be the nation's most pro-Israel government, and I have delivered on that promise. We have led fights for – against BDS with Israel. We have done trade missions to Israel. We've established strong relations between the state of Florida and the world's only Jewish state. America must always stand with the Jewish people and the state of Israel. (Cheers, applause.)

I promised that we would appoint constitutionalists to the federal courts like Justice Alito and Justice Thomas. Well, you know I'll do that because, as governor, I inherited the country's most liberal state supreme court, and through my appointments we now have the nation's most conservative supreme court in the state of Florida. (Cheers, applause.)

And through all of this, we've just stood up for the truth. When you tell the truth in this day and age, you face a lot of blowback. You have a lot of people that are going to come at you, taking potshots. But what we've shown in Florida is that there's a hunger for truth. People see

the deceit that's out there. They see lies told by the media and the left. They know that we need to restore sanity to this society once and for all.

And so I was able to run for office last year for reelection in a state that had traditionally been viewed as a very competitive state. Usually the elections were decided by one point. Well, we led with purpose, we led with conviction, and we delivered unprecedented results. And our election returns showed that the people responded. We didn't win by one point. We didn't win by 32,000 votes. We won by over 1.5 million votes, over a 20 – almost a 20-point margin. (Applause.) People want leadership. (Cheers, applause.)

So as we look forward, right now is this generation's time for choosing. As Ronald Reagan said then, I believe it's true now. We, us as Americans, have a rendezvous with destiny. We cannot fly the white flag of surrender into the face of the hostile forces that are doing everything they can to upend our way of life. We must stand firm for the truth. We must fight back. And we must win in 2024.

The time for excuses is over. I don't want to see like we need a mulligan after 2024. We need to get the job done. I can tell you this. I will get the job done. And with God's help, as your president, I will not let you down.

God bless you all. Thank you so much. (Cheers, applause.) Thank you. (Cheers, applause.) Thank you so much. Thank you. Thanks so much. (Cheers, applause.) God bless you all. Keep up the faith. (Cheers, applause.)

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