

# [***DeSantis moves toward running again in 2028 - and draws ire from Trump's inner circle***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDS-VKD1-JBSS-S46H-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; A month after ending his White House bid, Florida Gov. [*Ron DeSantis*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/politics/ron-desantis-vice-president-trump/index.html) is already making moves toward his next one.

DeSantis has made a concerted effort to keep in touch with the people who supported his presidential campaign, including donors and leaders in the early nominating states. Those close to him say he is actively considering how best to maintain his national profile and influence, including potential endorsements in congressional races. He is likely to start raising money for his political operation once again in the near future as well, one source with knowledge of the planning said.

He even popped up in South Carolina just days before [*the state's primary*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/24/politics/takeaways-south-carolina-republican-primary/index.html) for a curiously timed appearance that briefly sparked a flurry of confusion among advisers to former President Donald Trump, whom DeSantis endorsed but hasn't spoken to since dropping out of the race. The appearance was ultimately unrelated to the contest between Trump and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley in the Palmetto State, which DeSantis brushed aside as outside his purview.

"I'm not following the back and forth," he said of the primary race there.

His recent moves appear distinctly aimed at keeping intact his political operation and his popularity with Republicans. For his part, DeSantis hasn't denied he is considering another presidential campaign as soon as 2028.

"I haven't ruled anything out," he said in a private conversation with supporters, according to multiple outlets that reviewed a leaked recording and [*confirmed to CNN*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/politics/ron-desantis-vice-president-trump/index.html) by three individuals who listened to the call.

But DeSantis' remarks on that call - which included criticisms of Trump and his team - also provoked a heated response from the former president's advisers and allies. The public lashing served as a reminder to the Florida governor that his political future may yet rely on his standing in Trump's world.

"When it comes to ***politics***, we have moved on from being a Republican Party who turns the other cheek," said Taylor Budowich, the CEO of the pro-Trump super PAC MAGA Inc. "And while we are laser-focused on winning in November, if someone spits on our shoe, we have no problem delivering a fist to their throat."

The episode was illustrative of the delicate challenge ahead for Republicans seeking to carve out their own lane in Trump's GOP. While the former president's team insists they are focused on the 2024 election and not past rivalries, they also made clear they are deeply protective against Republicans who may undermine the push to get the former president back in the White House.

DeSantis, though, is intent on remaining a relevant figure in the GOP regardless of what happens to Trump. He has tested new strategies for growing his following, including posting self-recorded videos online where he opines on the political debate du jour or playfully features his young children. He is spearheading a national campaign to force federal term limits via constitutional amendment, the pet cause that brought him to South Carolina ahead of last week's primary and one that could provide other excuses to keep up his out-of-state travel.

DeSantis is also expected to once again form a state political committee in Florida that can raise unlimited sums of cash. It's the vehicle DeSantis used to generate the $83 million in seed money for the super PAC that supported his unsuccessful presidential campaign. DeSantis and his wife Casey have made thank you calls to many of his donors - the kind of personal outreach DeSantis eschewed in the past but could help keep his supporters close as he plots his next moves.

Notably, his campaign still had $8.8 million at the end of last month, long after he dropped out of the race, according to federal filings made public last week - money he could put toward a future presidential run.

But amid his plotting for the next presidential cycle, DeSantis has noticeably disengaged from this one. Neither he nor his campaign informed Trump's team that he intended to endorse the former president when he dropped out, sources from both camps previously told CNN, and he has not reached out since to congratulate Trump or discuss how he could help elect the former president.

Rather, in a candid interview the week after exiting the race, DeSantis reiterated his concerns about Trump's viability and the lack of GOP enthusiasm for a Trump-Biden rematch this November.

And while fellow former 2024 contenders South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and entrepreneur Vivek Ramasway have become willing and useful surrogates for Trump and leaned into the race to be his running mate, DeSantis has repeatedly made clear he has no interest in serving as vice president.

Trump advisers have watched these moves in disbelief, but largely ignored them until this week.

The tipping point, though, came when several news outlets on Wednesday published leaked details of DeSantis' call with about 200 supporters, including people who had signed up to serve as delegates. In his remarks, DeSantis criticized Trump's running mate search, accused conservative media of kowtowing to the former president and blamed former aides now in Trump's orbit for waging an aggressively negative campaign because they had "an ax to grind."

Allies of Trump and DeSantis both interpreted the remarks as a swipe not only at the former president, but also at Susie Wiles, one of the former president's top aides who once worked for the Florida governor and helped bring many of Trump's top advisers into the fold.

Trump's advisers took exception to the remarks, and several of them lashed out on social media with attacks on DeSantis' weight and eating habits. Chris LaCivita, a senior adviser to Trump's campaign, called DeSantis a "sad little man" on X.

The timing of DeSantis' remarks was particularly vexing to those in Trump's inner circle as it came just as the former president told Fox News that the Florida governor remained on his shortlist for vice president - even though neither side sees that as a likely outcome.

"We have to push back on Democrats. It's just the nature of ***politics***; it's conflict based," LaCivita told CNN. "But if you're supposedly on our team and you're taking shots at us, you're not going to get a free pass. We're not looking to pick fights, but we will finish them."

Trump viciously attacked DeSantis throughout 2023, focusing intensely on the governor in the lead up to the Iowa caucuses. Many of those missives stemmed from his personal animosity toward DeSantis for being "disloyal" by running against the former president after Trump had endorsed him for governor in 2017 - a sentiment widely shared among the former president's inner circle, many of whom once worked for DeSantis, according to multiple Trump campaign advisers and people close to the former president.

However, DeSantis' decision to exit the race prior to the New Hampshire primary and simultaneously endorse the former president was viewed by Trump's inner circle as a welcome signal that the Florida governor would be a gracious opponent in defeat. And Trump, for his part, was willing to drop his grudge toward DeSantis if it meant adding another supporter to his effort, his advisers argued.

A spokesperson for DeSantis' political operation did not return a request for comment. DeSantis' allies have downplayed his recent remarks as nothing new. One person with knowledge of the call described it simply as an opportunity for him to thank his supporters, one of several he has held with various groups since he dropped out of the race. The first call was shortly after DeSantis suspended his campaign in January with different state-level legislators that backed him in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

"I think that's people making a mountain out of a molehill," said Roy Bailey, a Dallas businessman and a top fundraiser for DeSantis. "There is a narrative but I don't think it's a factual one."

Bailey, who served as co-chair of Trump's finance committee **in** 2020 but switched allegiance to the Florida governor this cycle, said he expects many Republican donors will open up their checkbooks again for DeSantis if he runs for president in 2028.

"A lot of people have told me that they respect the fact that he got out as soon as he didn't have a pathway to win the nomination. It showed that he was in it for all the right reasons," Bailey said. "I think that's going to bode well for him because he's going to be remembered that way."

Privately, DeSantis has told advisers he stands by his decision to exit the race and throw his support behind Trump. He has insisted that there was no path to victory and Trump's legal troubles, while a potential liability in a general election, made him an unbeatable force in the GOP nominating fight.

But his assessment of the race, both publicly and behind closed doors, is largely absent acknowledgement of his own shortcomings as a candidate and advisers have struggled to convince him to consider changes he may need to make before running again. And concerns remain that DeSantis is walking a fine line between prudent steps to protect his political future and risking it by unnecessary clashing with Trump.

One fundraiser for the governor acknowledged DeSantis was still adjusting to life outside the spotlight of a national campaign in ways that have at times flummoxed those close to him.

"He's coming back and getting his sea legs again in Florida," the fundraiser said.

CNN's Kit Maher contributed to this story.

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