

# [***DeSantis And Florida GOP Poised To Take Up Controversial Bills On Trans Rights, Education, Gun Ownership And More As New Session Begins***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67PW-12T1-JBCM-F4FR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The session pushing such issues as gun rights, transgender medical care, immigration and restrictions on higher education is widely viewed as an opportunity for DeSantis to tout conservative policies ahead of his anticipated 2024 run.

**Body**

**Topline**

The GOP-controlled Florida legislature convenes a new session Tuesday in which they're set to take up a series of controversial bills on topics like immigration, LGBTQ rights, gun rights and press freedom, several of which are backed by Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) as he uses Florida ***politics*** as a launchpad for his 2024 presidential campaign.

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library on March 5 in Simi Valley, California.

Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

**Gun Rights:** HB 243would allow concealed carry of firearms without a license, which DeSantis hasthrown his supportbehind and said the legislature will pass this year.

**LGBTQ Rights:**HB 1223would build on last year s controversial Parental Rights in Education law known by critics as Don t Say Gay by requiring K-12 school staff to only use pronouns for a child s biological sex and expand restrictions on classroom instructions on gender identity and sexual orientation through the eighth grade, whileHB 1069requires students in grades 6-12 to be taught sex is determined by biology and reproductive function at birth and further restricts classroom instructional materials.

**Higher Education:**HB 999would prohibit state universities from any programs or hiring practices involving diversity, equity, and inclusion, outlaw any university major or minors in Gender Studies or anything related to it, make it easier to review tenured professors and give more power to the state s Board of Governors, which is made up of DeSantis appointees.

**Immigration:**DeSantisis proposinga wave of new restrictions on undocumented immigrants in Florida and wants torepealsome previous state laws that had actually expanded their rights such as prohibiting undocumented immigrants from practicing law, receiving tuition waivers and being issued ID cards, as well as expanding the use of an E-Verify system for employers to check employees immigration status.

**Freedom of the Press:**HB 991would make it easier to sue media outlets for defamation such as bylowering the bar for who constitutes a public figure, making anonymous quotes presumed to be false by default and saying that accusing someone of discrimination constitutes defamation while SB 1316 wouldrequirebloggers who write about DeSantis or the state government to register with the state.

**Transgender Rights:**SB 254prohibits gender-affirming care for minors under age 18, and makes it possible for parents to lose custody of their children if they subject the child to the provision of sex-reassignment prescriptions or procedures.

**What To Watch For**

The legislative session will last for 60 days and end in early May, with DeSantis widely expected to launch his 2024 bid sometime after the session ends. The governor has promised the legislative session will be the most productive session we ve had for pushing his administration s agenda ahead of his anticipated presidential run.

**What We Don t Know**

What other controversial bills may be filed. The**New York Times**notesmore legislation is likely to be filed later in the session, as that allows lawmakers to have more time to prepare bills and less time to debate them before they re up for a vote. It s particularly expected Republican lawmakers could introduce new restrictions on abortion after previously enacting a 15-week ban in the state, though it s still not clear yet how far such a ban would go. It also still remains to be seen how many of the bills that have been introduced will actually pass, and not all of them have been explicitly endorsed by DeSantis, such as the restrictions on bloggers.

**Crucial Quote**

I ve never seen a governor in my lifetime with this much absolute control of the agenda in Tallahassee as Ron DeSantis, Florida lobbyist and DeSantis supporter Brian Ballardtoldthe**Tampa Bay Times**.

**Chief Critics**

Many of the proposed bills for Florida s legislative session have already drawn widespread criticism even before the session has officially begun. The American Association of University Professors hasdenouncedthe higher education bill, saying it would destroy academic freedom, tenure, shared governance and university independence in the state s public higher education system, for instance, and anti-gun violence organization Giffordsdecriedthe permitless carry bill as dangerous legislation that will drive gun violence up and further jeopardize the safety of our families and communities. First Amendment Foundation executive director Bobby Block told theabout the defamation bill: This is about intimidating free speech, chilling free speech and silencing critics.

**Tangent**

Anothercontroversial billthat s been introduced, but faces far longer odds of passing, would completely abolish the Democratic Party in Florida and require the state s 4.9 million registered Democrats to be unaffiliated or register with a different party, by directing state officials to eliminate any political party that has previously advocated for, or been in support of, slavery or involuntary servitude. State Sen. Blaise Ingoglia (R), who introduced what s called the Ultimate Cancel Act, said he had drafted the bill without any involvement from DeSantis, and the governor has not endorsed the legislation.

**Key Background**

The new legislative session adds on to a string of controversial actions DeSantis and the Republican-controlled legislature have taken, as the governor has sought to institute so-called anti-woke policies that have often drawn criticism. The state garnered national attention for the Don t Say Gay bill, for instance, which sparked a battle with Disney that resulted in the governorpenalizing the companyfor opposing the policy and appointinghis own boardto oversee the special district that controls Walt Disney World. Florida has also restrictedclassroom librariesand publiclyrejecteda proposed new AP African-American Studies course for having a political agenda, in addition to other controversial measures, like the state s 15-week abortion ban. The controversial policies have raised DeSantis national political profile, and while he s drawn widespread criticism from the left, he won reelection in November by a 19-point margin and is widely viewed as former President Donald Trump s primary rival in the 2024 GOP primary. The start of the legislative session comes as DeSantis has been trying to make more of a name for himself nationally over the past few weeks,releasing a bookthat touts Florida s blueprint for America s survival andmaking appearancesacross the country.

**Further Reading**

In Florida Legislative Session, a Chance for DeSantis to Check Off His Wish List(New York Times)

DeSantis sway over Florida Legislature unprecedented ahead of 2024 bid(Tampa Bay Times)

Florida bills would ban gender studies, limit trans pronouns, erode tenure(Washington Post)

Republicans In Florida Are Trying To Get Rid Of The Democratic Party(Forbes)

'Disaster for free speech': Florida defamation, libel bill alarms advocates(Tallahassee Democrat)

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