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POLITICS

DeSantis unveils an aggressive immigration and border security policy that largely mirrors Trump's



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Published 11:40 AM EST, June 26, 2023

EAGLE PASS, Texas (AP) — Republican [presidential candidate Ron DeSantis](#) promised to end birthright citizenship, finish building the southern border wall and send U.S. forces into Mexico to combat drug cartels as part of an aggressive — and familiar — immigration policy proposal he laid out Monday in a Texas border city.

The sweeping plan, the Florida governor's first detailed policy release as a 2024 contender, represents a long-established wish list of Republican immigration proposals that largely mirrors [former President Donald Trump's policies](#). Much of DeSantis' plan faces tall odds, requiring the reversal of legal precedents, approval from other countries or even an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Still, DeSantis projected confidence on Monday, excoriating leaders in both political parties for failing to stop what he called an immigrant "invasion." He addressed his plans while touring Eagle Pass, a community that has emerged as a major corridor for illegal border crossings during Joe Biden's presidency.

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"I have listened to people in D.C. for years and years and years, going back decades — Republicans and Democrats — always chirping about this yet never actually bringing the issue to a conclusion," DeSantis told an audience of roughly 100 residents, including local Democratic officials, school teachers and mothers of children lost to fentanyl overdoses. "What we're saying is no excuses on this."

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He likened illegal border crossings to home break-ins and warned that drug traffickers trying to bring their product into the United States could wind up "stone cold dead."

"If somebody were breaking into your house to do something bad, you would respond with force. Yet why don't we do that at the southern border?" DeSantis asked. "So if the cartels are cutting through the border wall, trying to run product into this country, they're going to end up stone cold dead as a result of that bad decision."

"And if you do that one time, you're not going to see them mess with our wall ever again," he said.

The DeSantis campaign has promised to release more detailed policy rollouts in the coming weeks. But in leading with immigration, the two-term Florida governor is prioritizing [a divisive issue](#) that has long been a focus of the GOP's most conservative voters. The pro-immigrant group America's Voice condemned DeSantis for making "invasion" references that have been used by white supremacists.

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Yet voters in the political middle have warmed to more aggressive immigration policies in recent months as [illegal border crossing surged](#). Overall, 6 in 10 adults in the U.S. disapprove of Biden's handling of immigration, according to a recent [AP-NORC poll](#).

Still, it may be difficult for DeSantis to separate himself on immigration from [the many other Republicans](#) seeking the 2024 presidential nomination — especially Trump, the front-runner.

That didn't stop him from trying.

Speaking from a podium emblazoned with the words, "No Excuses" and "Stop the Invasion," DeSantis noted that there were more immigrants deported in the first four years of the Obama administration than in Trump's first term.

He made repeated references to the unfinished border wall, an indirect knock on the former president, who is now his chief rival in the crowded Republican presidential primary. Trump tried and ultimately failed to finish a border wall along the entire 1,950-mile (3,140-kilometer) U.S.-Mexico border during his four years in office.

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Before the Monday announcement, the DeSantis campaign released new merchandise bearing the words, "Build The Wall. No Excuses."

Trump apparently watched DeSantis on television, describing his trip to the border as "a total waste of time."

"He is a failed candidate, whose sole purpose in making the trip was to reiterate the fact that he would do all of the things done by me in creating the strongest Border, by far, in U.S. history," Trump wrote on social media.

The fierce feud between Trump and DeSantis, which includes clashes over policy and personality, will continue on Tuesday as both men are scheduled to campaign in New Hampshire. But immigration has been central to their messages no matter where they are.

Trump emphasized immigration while delivering the keynote address to hundreds of enthusiastic religious conservatives at the Faith and Freedom Coalition's conference in Washington over the weekend. He promised to carry out "the largest domestic deportation operation on the border" and boasted about

completing more than 300 miles (or 480 kilometers) of wall along the southern border during his administration while promising to build even more should he win another term.

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Trump's policies worked to constrict immigration, but the number of people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border still swelled during his time in office before dropping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

And his policies caused clogs in the system that led to massive overcrowding; for instance, the immigration court case backlog alone grew from roughly 500,000 in June 2016 to 1.3 million cases by the end of 2020. There were massive human rights concerns, too, particularly with the Remain in Mexico program and the separation of children from their families at the border.

Facing reporters on Monday, DeSantis said he would be more "aggressive" than Trump in implementing strong immigration policies if elected president.

"I think a lot of the things he's saying, you know, I agree with," he said of Trump. "But I also think those are the same things that were said back in 2016."

Like Trump, DeSantis vowed to end the practice, as outlined in the Constitution, that grants citizenship to all babies born on U.S. soil. The 14th Amendment states: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and the State wherein they reside."

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DeSantis promises to end the United States' so-called catch-and-release policy, which currently allows for the release of immigrants in the country illegally until their court dates. That's because federal immigration authorities have the money for just 30,000 beds, making it impossible to detain everyone who is arrested.

DeSantis also wants to reinstitute the Remain in Mexico policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court. Such a plan would need Mexico's approval.

He's calling for closing the "Flores loophole," which, among other things, requires families to generally be released from custody in 20 days. It is part of a federal court order, so it's unclear how he could close it.

DeSantis is also promising to use military force against drug cartels if necessary. He would "reserve the right to operate across the border to secure our territory from Mexican cartel activities," according to the plan, which also calls for the U.S. Navy and the Coast Guard to block precursor chemicals from entering Mexican ports if "the Mexican government won't stop cartel drug manufacturing."

DeSantis' plan says little about the millions of immigrants already living in the country illegally, aside from promising to deport those who have overstayed their visas. Deporting such people has been a challenge that has eluded authorities for decades.

In September, the small border city of Eagle Pass made international headlines when nine people drowned in their attempt to swim through the Rio Grande.

DeSantis was supportive of one audience member who suggested that the situation at the border constituted an "act of war."

"I think the state of Texas has the right to declare an invasion," DeSantis told the man. "You're going to see as president under Article 2 of the Constitution, you have a responsibility and a duty to protect the country. We are going to do that and we are going to do that robustly."

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writers Elliot Spagat in San Diego, Will Weissert and Colleen Long in Washington, and Jill Colvin in New York contributed to this report.

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