

DeSantis call with Conservative media (via Mediaite)

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BRYAN GRIFFIN: Hi, all, this is Bryan Griffin. Thanks for joining us. We're going to get started in just a couple of minutes if you've joined us with a phone number. If you've joined us with the phone number, please go ahead and change that phone number to your name so that we know who's attended. Please go and do that now. Thank you. We'll get started in just a couple of minutes. Okay.

Good evening, everybody. It is 9:51. I respect everyone's time, but we appreciate you joining us as promised. Wanted to make sure everyone had extra access here this evening. Of course, the big exciting evening. So thank you so much. Here's the way we're going to conduct this meeting. We're going to have some introductory remarks from the governor, and then we're going to move into a question-and-answer period. Please use the hand raise feature on your teams meeting to indicate that you'd like to ask a question. And we will be glad to recognize you. We will unmute you from the admin side. Very good. Okay, we're going to get started. I will introduce now without further ado, Governor Ron DeSantis.

FLORIDA GOV. RON DESANTIS: Well, good evening. We are at a internet-breaking start with Elon Musk. You know, he offered me the ability to do either a SpaceX rocket or Twitter. I just figured Twitter would be safer. Turns out that we had too many people that tried to join.

So in some respects, you know, that's a that's a good sign. We were able to get it roll in and I think had some good substantive conversations about about some stuff in a way that I think these things typically cannot. We'll be doing a lot of we did a lot of other media today. We're doing a lot of media tomorrow over the Memorial Day weekend. I'll be doing things in Florida at to commemorate that in my role as governor. And then next week we will be launching, you know, major events and all these early states. And when we work, we work very hard.

And so we're not just going to, you know, show up once in a blue moon. I mean, we're there. We're going to paint every corner of these early states. And so that'll start in earnest next week. And we've got an incredible amount of enthusiasm. I think we're raising massive amounts of money online, which is obviously a good sign. And Twitter apparently is getting like massive new people signing up to Twitter. You know, that was one of the things when you're thinking about doing this, it's like obviously very few Republican primary voters, you know, in reality, are on Twitter. It's more of a sub-selection. We felt that the news about it would reverberate because the villain and how famous he was. And I think that that's what's happened indicative of kind of what we're seeing on the on the donation side.

But I do think that we're probably driving more people to now use Twitter. I don't know if that's a good thing or not. I mean, I guess it just depends. But we're excited to have been a part of that and we're excited to be getting underway. I mean, we've had a lot of work to do over the last six months since the election. We were able to bring in for a landing, the most far-reaching agenda that that any Republican has done in our lifetime. And I'd put it up against anybody, and we're proud of that. But that took a lot of work. I didn't necessarily have the ability to be fighting all these battles nationally, even though I've been the number one target from not just corporate media, but from our own side and pretty much everyone in between.

And I think that that will likely continue. But I think we'll be in a position where, you know, we'll be fighting back and doing it very effectively. So we're happy to entertain any questions that people have.

GRIFFIN: Okay, so one moment. Now's the time, everyone. If you could go out, raise your hand. We're going to admit a couple of these latecomers and we'll jump in the questions. Go ahead, everybody. Okay. We'll start with Phil Wegman.

PHILLIP WEGMANN (REALCLEARPOLITICS): Thank you very much. Question for the governor. You made the contrast with the former president implicit at times. Going forward, do you believe that you will make more than just an affirmative case for yourself, but an explicit case for why Donald Trump should not be reelected?

UNIDENTIFIED: Hello.

[crosstalk]: Okay. Sorry. We're ready to go, Governor. And you can hear me now. Yeah, I can hear you. Okay. Yeah,

GOV. DESANTIS: I heard your question. So I was answering it. I guess they had it be muted.

So he's drawing, I think helpful contrast with me now. He's running attacks, attacking me for voting against an omnibus spending bill that he signed when he was president. Absolutely, I think he should not have signed those omnibus spending bills. He added almost \$8 trillion to the debt in a four-year period of time. I'm happy to be on the conservative side of that debate because I think our debt's gone up way too much.

He also attacked me for voting against an amnesty bill that he had endorsed—2 million-person amnesty bill, Goodlatte 2.0 in 2018. And he said that it was 'voting against the wall.' But if you remember that bill was like a pittance for that in exchange for a massive amnesty. Well, of course, you're not going to do a massive amnesty. I oppose amnesty. I thought it was supposed to be America First policy to oppose amnesty, and yet he endorsed and tried to ram through an amnesty.

And so you know, these are contrasts and I'm happy to discuss. I find it odd that they would want to raise those. I think that they're counting on people not necessarily asking questions about it, but we'll be sure to let everyone know what those differences were. He wanted omnibus. I opposed omnibus. He wanted amnesty. I opposed amnesty.

WEGMANN: Very good. And then will there be a more traditional campaign announcement, sir? Like a rally, as

GRIFFIN: We're going to do one question and time because we have so many people on the line. Take one and take one second and then a couple more people who are in the waiting room for those latecomers. And next up, we're going to take a question from Nannette Holt. Epoch Times [—]. And meet yourself in Nannette. you hear me now? Yes, go ahead. Awesome.

NANNETTE HOLT (EPOCH TIMES): Congratulations on a very exciting day. Governor in team question, I heard you mentioned today that on day one, the border would be a priority. I was wondering at what period of time do you think you'll need to complete that border wall you mentioned using the military? Just wanting to know a few more details about that. And thank you.

GOV. DESANTIS: Sure. Well, I don't know. I mean, I think obviously we got to see what it looks like when you get in there. But I'm going to make it a day-one priority. I will use all the levers available to me to push that through. And, you know, I tell the story about when we had a hurricane and down here it

knocked out a couple of bridges. People said it would be six months. We got one done in three days and the other done in two weeks. And I can tell you that it was not anything anybody expected. And so it's cutting through red tape. It's telling people not to make excuses and just getting the job done.

And you just have to be disciplined. You can't get distracted on this stuff. You got to stay with with the goal. And that's what we'll do because, you know, I've been watching this issue far before I was ever in elected office. I mean, it's been something that's been going on for decades. And I think our voters just want to see it put to an end. You know, there's been a lot of promises about it, but yet here we are. It's as bad as it's ever been. And so we need to bring this to a conclusion. And we want obviously do it as soon as possible. But the reality is, if I'm there, it will get done, which is more than has happened in the past.

GRIFFIN: Thank you. We'll take Rebecca Downs next with Townhall. Rebecca Downs.

REBECCA DOWNS (TOWNHALL): Hi. Thank you so much, Governor, for holding this call. So I have heard you mentioned in previous rallies and events you've spoken at that you don't really look at the polls. If I'm remembering your remarks correctly. That being said, you know, you are down by double digits in the Republican primary. That could, of course, be because you have just announced today. And I'm wondering if how you plan on bridging that gap and or if you are still going to just no longer look at the polls. That's something you're not worried about at this time. Thank you.

GOV. DESANTIS: Well, I think that when I say that, I think that you're misunderstanding. Not that I do really care about the horse race polls. But what I make the point about being governors and I've never to this day polled issues to tell me how to feel on a given issue or not. I just don't think that it that it's helpful. I don't think that it's something that should move a leader. I think a leader has got to set the vision. You can bring people to your side, you know, in terms of how this stuff is, I would be shocked if the former president wasn't leading, he's 100 percent name ID, one of the most famous people in the world, and had been president of the United States. But I would say that I don't think there's been a governor in the modern history of the party that has had, you know, more support nationwide.

It's been able to build an organization. And the way we've been able to and the path that we're getting now. So, you know, we're and then, of course, we're bringing to bear a record of accomplishment that I don't think anyone can match either. So those are all good things. But I would just remind people, you know, I won my last election by about 20 points. None of these media polls had me winning by 20 points and fact, there were polls being shopped saying that I was losing to Crist in October. Some had us tied. You can go back and look at a lot of the stuff that was out there and it just is what it is. And so, you know, we have a good operation here. They will be doing those.

That type of poll is not going to influence kind of what I view on an issue. But they will have a good sense of kind of where our support is and where we need to do better. And we'll make sure that that we're able to get that done. But I mean, this thing is just starting. I don't think the average Republican primary voters obsessing over this yet. I think that that'll take some time. But I think we have this these next few months to really build out what we need to build out. I think we're going into the race with more local endorsements in the early state than any candidate has ever had going in without even being an announced candidate.

I mean, when you're getting the leader of the Senate and the House majority leader in the in the House and Iowa without me even being a candidate, I mean, that's a big deal that the majority leader of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, I didn't even ask them. They all just they all just did it. So we feel really good about that. And, you know, I think we're going to have a lot of ground to trot and we think there's a lot of fertile ground out there.

GRIFFIN: Okay. One second. Folks willing to let a couple of people in, more of the stragglers here. Okay. Up next, let's do Mollie Hemingway with The Federalist. Mollie,

MOLLIE HEMINGWAY (FEDERALIST): Thank you. Can you hear me? Yes, Yes. Right. Governor, you said on Fox tonight you want a settlement in Ukraine and no troops on the ground. That's a bit vague. The U.S. has spent more than \$100 billion in Ukraine with no end in sight. Can you give us a specific dollar amount of additional money you would give Ukraine before pulling the plug and telling Zelensky that there will be no more funding?

GOV. DESANTIS: Well, I would hope that by January of 2025 that this thing is resolved. You know, I think that I think that there should be a settlement that's sought much sooner than that. You know, Ukraine is going to do this offensive over the summer. And at that point, I think you're going to be looking at a need to bring this in for a landing. So that's how I would do it if I were there. Now, I don't think that you know, us being involved in a war of attrition is in our interest. And, you know, I've said that I've said that repeatedly.

GRIFFIN: We're going to go Josh Miller, Florida Standard. Josh.

JOSH MILLER (FLORIDA STANDARD): Hi, Governor. Thank you for spending this time with us tonight. My question is, you've had a busy couple of months already and it's about to get busier for you and you just got done leading the state at the same time as the very successful legislative session. But there are some in mainstream media who are saying that you're going to forget about Floridians and that you're not going to pay attention to Florida as you launch your presidential campaign. What would you say to those people?

GOV. DESANTIS: Weren't those the same people that were complaining that I wasn't doing stuff for presidential a couple of months ago? I mean, they were saying, oh, he's not speaking out on this. He's not speaking out on this. I think those folks, whatever I do, they will criticize the other way. So if I'm doing something, they'll be on the opposite of that. If I had done the opposite, they would be the opposite. And that's just the way it is. I mean, we just did more than anybody has done, I would say probably in an entire four-year term, certainly over over over this stretch.

And, you know, the way Florida works is we get through these legislative sessions, we bring all this stuff in for a landing. The summer politically is a little, little light in Florida because people are doing other stuff. That's just kind of been the nature of it.

So we spend a lot of time just preparing for potential disasters. I will do that again. That will obviously take priority. We take a lot of pride and response and we will do that if it happens and hopefully we get spared this season. But of course, we're we're assuming that that will get we'll get hit one way or another. And we'll be ready to go. So a lot of these people, they criticize what I actually do as governor. And so they want me doing more of what they're always complaining about. So this is just bad faith criticism.

GRIFFIN: Okay. We've got time for two more. Will do. Julia Johnson from the Washington Examiner.

JULIA JOHNSON (WASHINGTON EXAMINER): Hi, Governor. Thank you so much for taking my question. So I'm curious, you did mention the debt a little bit and some of the debt that Trump actually added when he was in office. What would you do differently with this current debt ceiling impasse?

GOV. DESANTIS: Well, look, I mean, obviously, if I were President, I would side with the House. They're making very modest. I mean, I would actually ask them to do more. But, I mean, they're doing very modest reductions in spending, which you have to do. I just don't see how you can kind of continue to go on in this way. And, of course, you know, part of the reason we're in the mess is because starting in March of 2020 with the COVID, all that stuff was really a mistake. And it starts end and with the Fauci stuff.

But we flush trillions of dollars down the drain, I think, in ways that were not necessary in hindsight, and we would have been much better off just handling it like Sweden did as a country. And this is paying the piper now with all the debt that's been racked up. But I mean, for Biden to not, you know, to be engaged I think is a farce. This is this is the bare minimum what the House did to be able to get that done. And that should be that should be kind of the the opening salvo as president, you would want to move it in a better direction than even that. I would I would want to.

GRIFFIN: And let's do Kurt Schlichter.

KURT SCHLICHTER (TOWNHALL): Governor, Kurt Schlichter from Town Hall. Good to talk to you again. Look, you're a military guy, Governor. You're looking at the deep battle. You've got to defeat Donald Trump for the primary. Then you've got to defeat Joe Biden. How do you reunite the Republican Party after you defeat Donald Trump? And then what is your strategy for winning? What's going to be a very tough general election?

GOV. DESANTIS: Well, look, these primaries happen and, you know, we typically come together I get this one. You know, you have a wild card and it could be a little bit different. But at the end of the day, I think you struggle to come back together after primaries. If you have a factional candidate that wins, that is not acceptable to the broad swath of people in the party.

And I think with me, I won 97 percent of Republicans in my reelection. You know, we are acceptable to broad swaths. It's not like I'm taking policy positions that are alienating massive segments of Republicans. And so people are going to see somebody who's got a proven record of success, who's representing the values that the vast, vast majority of our party professes to hold. And I think that they're going to say, okay, we have a chance to do Biden or we have a chance to go with the governor. And that's really an easy decision.

And so we think without question will be, well, well equipped to do that. I do think, though, that that's part of what you need to do. But what also is part of what you need to do is we need to win those independent voters that we were able to win overwhelmingly in Florida, that Bryan Kemp and Kim Reynolds could win in their governor's races. But that we were not able to win in 2020 or in 2022. And the majority of these House and Senate races that were really, really significant. I think that there's millions of people that want to move on from Biden. And I think that they're ripe for us to be able to get. But I think you got to have you got to have a vehicle that that they're comfortable with. And I think

we've shown in Florida that we're able to win voters who don't don't always vote Republican. You know, you can't win 60/40 with only Republicans.

I mean, our when I when my election was we had 2 percent more registered R's than D's in Florida. And so the only way you can get to a number like that is by winning a significant percentage of independents. And even, you know, we even want a slice of Democrats, which I think that there's there's some possibility there as well. So put the party back together, but also be able to try to win independents because I think they want to move on from Biden. I think that's pretty clear. I think they just want to have a vehicle that they're comfortable with. And I think we've shown in Florida that we're a good landing spot for a lot of those voters. And I think we would be going up against Biden in 2024.

I mean, look, I think he's a weak candidate. I think he has a weak record. But the way our society is, you know, the left, they will pull out all the stops they've got major corporations and the media that are going to be supporting and propping up their candidate. They've really done a good job of manipulating the, you know, the ballot collections in some of these states. We will be doing ballot harvesting in the states where it's legal if I'm the candidate. Zucker bucks in like a place like Nevada where it's legal. I think it's terrible that this is going on. We banned all that in Florida, but I don't think you can say like, don't play the way they're playing. Obviously, that system benefits them because of the composition of their electorate is more susceptible to harvesting and things like that.

Our voters typically don't like you harvesting their votes. And so I don't know that we could like match them, vote for vote, but we can't leave any votes on the table. And so I think there's only a handful of states that will truly be competitive. Not all of them allow this, but the that do Nevada, Pennsylvania, these in Wisconsin may change on ballot harvesting because the Supreme Court flipped. If that happens, then you got to be ready to go on all those. And I'm confident those organizations will be there for us. We've already talked to the folks and that'll be done. But I think you got to do that. I think you got to assume that it's going to be a very close election. I do think that there is a possibility that you could just decisively win the argument with the country in a way that just kind of moves everything in our direction.

I do think that that's possible because I think Biden there's not going to be a lot of enthusiasm for him amongst Democrats. And so I think they're going to really struggle with turnout. I mean, I think that I think, obviously that Trump would turn out Democrats because that's just that's their reflex. I think in Florida, what we showed is we demoralized the Democrats. They did not have a good turnout running against me as governor. And I think it would be more similar to that nationally if I was running against Biden. And that's obviously a good thing, because I think I think most of our voters would be would be pretty enthusiastic. I had a chance to eject Biden from office.

GRIFFIN: Okay, folks. Well, thanks a lot for joining us and this innovative platform here and a way to, of course, give you access. I was able to randomize the questions tonight. We look forward. I know that everybody didn't get to ask theirs, but we look forward to doing more of these opportunities. I look forward to being in touch with all of you on the trail. Thank you. Good night.