

Ron DeSantis offers to move part of US ag department to Iowa as part of relocation policy

Phillip Sitter, Des Moines Register

Published online 2-Dec., 2023

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2023/12/02/gop-presidential-candidate-ron-desantis-completes-99-country-tour-during-iowa-caucuses-campaign/71718112007/>

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said he would offer to at least partially relocate the U.S. Department of Agriculture to Iowa if he is elected president — part of a federal agency relocation policy he shared Saturday while celebrating the completion of his visit to all 99 Iowa counties.

DeSantis, his campaign and supporters celebrated in Newton his touted completion of a "Full Grassley" tour to all of Iowa's counties. The "Full Grassley" was coined by longtime U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, who travels to every Iowa county each year.

But DeSantis offered to bring more to Iowa in the future than himself and his family.

"We have to take power out of Washington, D.C., and send it to other parts of the country," DeSantis said. As president, "I'm going to order all of our cabinet secretaries to reduce their agency's footprint in Washington, D.C., by at least 50%."

For Iowa, that would mean "you guys will have first dibs on the Department of Agriculture," he said.

"A number of people said they don't like USDA Washington bureaucrats interfering with how people are farming, and they would much rather have this agency be run with people from their own communities."

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, who campaigned for DeSantis with him Saturday in Newton, later said through a spokesperson, "It's a great idea. There's no better place to put USDA, because there's no one who knows farming better than Iowans."

Two U.S. Department of Agriculture research agencies were moved in September 2019 from the nation's capital to Kansas City under the administration of then-President Donald Trump.

According to the Associated Press, the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's moves were pitched as putting them closer to farmers, though much of their work involves advising members of Congress in Washington.

However, many workers left the agencies who couldn't or didn't want to move across the country, leaving the agencies understaffed and reducing the scope and frequency in the release of data farmers looked to.

DeSantis says completing the "Full Grassley" is about more than Iowa

The DeSantis campaign shared a list of 130 stops across 98 of Iowa's counties with the Des Moines Register. Newton in Jasper County brought the total Saturday to 99.

DeSantis' accounting included high profile events such as the Family Leadership Summit in Polk County and U.S. Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks' annual tailgate in Johnson County.

It also included private events, such as fundraisers for state legislators, in addition to stops at the world's largest popcorn ball in Sac County and Waspy's Truck Stop in Audubon County.

DeSantis said in Newton that visiting the state's 99 counties is not just about the Iowa Caucuses, but about how he would lead the entire country.

He said doing the "Full Grassley" tour shows he considers himself a "servant, not a ruler" — someone who comes from among the people he serves, earns support for his candidacy and serves no agenda but of the people.

"Iowa will begin the revival of the United States of America," DeSantis said.

Republican presidential candidate Ryan Binkley's campaign claimed that Binkley completed a "Full Grassley" tour on Nov. 10.

DeSantis and Nikki Haley were tied for second place far behind former President Donald Trump in the most recent Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa Poll, though polling nationally has shown Haley's popularity has been increasing while DeSantis' has been slipping.

Still, DeSantis has been accumulating a rising number of endorsements from Iowa political leaders. Several of them joined him and his wife, Casey DeSantis, in Newton Saturday, including Reynolds, Family Leader president and CEO Bob Vander Plaats, Iowa House Majority Leader Rep. Matt Wineschl and other state lawmakers.

Vander Plaats said, "Voting for Ron DeSantis is not against Donald Trump. It is about the future of our country."

Reynolds said DeSantis "showed up for us, now we've got to show up for him."

Des Moines Register reporter Brienne Pfannenstiel and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

In Iowa, Ron DeSantis criticizes polls, says he'd succeed as GOP's presidential nominee

Phillip Sitter

Des Moines Register

Published online 11-Nov., 2023

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2023/11/11/in-iowa-caucus-ron-desantis-criticizes-poll-results-showing-him-distant-2nd-tied-nikki-haley/71548402007/>

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Republican presidential candidate and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis questioned the integrity of polls when asked by a caucusgoer over Veterans Day weekend in Iowa how he plans to improve his standing and win.

But people at the event in Muscatine on Saturday — including the person who asked the question — said they need to hear more from DeSantis before he gets their support. Spence Brown, of Muscatine, told DeSantis at a meet and greet in the lobby of the Kent Corp. in Muscatine that he's leaning toward supporting him but needed to see DeSantis' heart come across more.

Brown said other people do, too, given his position in polls.

DeSantis and every other GOP presidential candidate are behind former President Donald Trump by a wide margin. And while support for former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley has risen, it's slipped for DeSantis. They are now tied for a distant second place among likely Republican caucusgoers in the most recent Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa Poll.

The Iowa Poll is widely considered to be the gold standard of polling and receives an A+ from FiveThirtyEight's pollster ratings.

DeSantis told people in the crowd at Muscatine to be skeptical of polls. He said he's focused on winning the Iowa Caucus by being a candidate who shows up and meets people, not "juicing a poll."

"Some of this stuff is so fraudulent when you look at it," he said, accusing media outlets of not wanting to release polls if the results are in his favor. "They want Trump to be the candidate, for their reasons," DeSantis said.

"I've never seen the obsession with these polls before. It's like they report that it's ... actually functional news. And a lot of people pay for these things," DeSantis added.

He did not name any specific poll but did describe poll results for his recent reelection to lead Florida that he said did not ultimately match his victory there.

"We've shown an ability to move and I think in Florida — Florida is a microcosm of this country," DeSantis said.

"I think Florida, Texas, Georgia, Arizona, those states will be great for us and then we'll battle out those other states, but we're going to get the job done," DeSantis added.

Brown told the Register after the event of DeSantis' response: "I don't think he answered the question. Trump's very far ahead, so the polls are not that far off."

He said DeSantis is "so far behind he needs to do something different."

His advice to DeSantis was to talk about "his vision to return the country to a more constitutional republic."

"He comes across as a manager. I love that. He's very capable. But he's not showing his heart enough and he's not painting the vision you want to walk into," Brown said.

Meanwhile, Steve Kallenberger, of Muscatine, said he's a past Trump supporter who's currently undecided.

Kallenberger liked what DeSantis had to say Saturday. But given that it was Veterans Day, he wanted to hear more from DeSantis on the military and how he would "make us the superpower that we once were," given what he said were shortages of ammunition and too much focus in the military on being politically correct.

"Let's stop worrying about all these little skirmishes and getting our military spread out," Kallenberger said. He added that he completely backs Israel — which is currently at war with the Hamas militant group in the Gaza Strip — but does not want to see any American troops sent to the war.

DeSantis once again in Muscatine expressed his support for Israel and skepticism over U.S. aid to Ukraine in its defense against Russia. He criticized "sending billions of dollars to pay pensions for Ukrainian bureaucrats and their salaries."

"Obviously, I think that Russia is hostile to the United States. I also think Russia is more of a threat to Europe than they are to us. But you hear some of these other Republicans acting like this is like 'Freedom and democracy hangs in the balance,'" DeSantis said. "I mean, Ukraine, they've got rampant corruption. Just be honest about that."

On DeSantis' chances for getting the Republican presidential nomination, Kallenberger said they're "average."

"From people I talk to — conservatives, they're Republican supporters, of course — it's almost like it's either a Trump or no-Trump, it's either Trump or nobody," he said. "It doesn't even seem like they're actually taking the time to listen to the other people."

Ron DeSantis pledges to refuse letting in Gaza refugees, says they're all anti-Semitic

Katie Akin, Phillip Sitter

Des Moines Register

Published online 16-Oct., 2023

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2023/10/16/ron-desantis-says-us-should-not-accept-gaza-palestine-refugees-as-israel-hamas-war-intensifies/71186751007/>

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis took hardline stances on the Israel-Hamas war during a one-day swing through Iowa, telling audiences there "was never a Palestinian-Arab state" in the region and all residents of Gaza are anti-Semitic.

Even as DeSantis flew home hundreds of Floridians who were stuck in Israel, he said the U.S. should refuse any refugees fleeing Gaza.

"We cannot accept people from Gaza into this country as refugees. I am not going to do that," DeSantis said in Creston. "If you look at how they behave — not all of them are Hamas, but they are all anti-Semitic, none of them believe in Israel's right to exist. None of the Arab states are willing to take any of them."

Hamas, a militant Islamic group that governs the Gaza Strip, infiltrated Israel on Oct. 7, killing and capturing more than 1,000 Israelis. The attack comes after decades of strife across the region and a 16-year Israeli blockade on the flow of people and goods in and out of Gaza.

DeSantis quickly threw his support behind Israel while campaigning in Iowa just hours after the initial Hamas attack. When he returned to Iowa Saturday, DeSantis denounced anyone critical of Israel or sympathetic to Palestinians who say they have a claim to more land and sovereignty in the region.

Since the Oct. 7 attack, Israel has launched airstrikes in Gaza and more than 1 million Gazans have evacuated their homes. Necessities such as food, water and medicine are running low, as humanitarian aid is stalled at the border.

Ron DeSantis says Israel must 'destroy everything and destroy Hamas' in Gaza

As Israel prepares to likely launch a major ground invasion into Gaza — what would almost certainly be a bloody endeavor in the densely populated area, after days of airstrikes that have already killed thousands of people — DeSantis said in Council Bluffs that Israel has to "go in, and they've got to end Hamas."

"They've got to retake all the infrastructure, destroy everything and destroy Hamas once and for all. That's what they have to do just to defend themselves," DeSantis said.

DeSantis said Hamas and other Islamist groups "don't care about having a state for themselves," but rather aim to annihilate the Jewish state. He argued that there has never been a Palestinian state in the region, as the Jewish people have an ancient right to the area.

"There was never a Palestinian-Arab state," DeSantis said Saturday. "Those lands, and particularly the ones where the media will claim they're occupied, Judea-Sumaria, those are some of the most ancient Jewish lands from Biblical times."

Britain took control of the Arab-majority Palestine after World War I and declared it a "national home" for Jewish people. After decades of strife between a surge of Jewish immigrants and the Palestinians who were living in the region, the United Nations in 1947 proposed separate Jewish and Arab states, but Arab leaders rejected the idea.

Jewish leaders created the state of Israel in 1948 and fought a year-long war to control most of the territory in the region. Since then, Israel has built settlements into Palestinian-controlled territories.

Americans and Iowans are divided in their perspectives on the complex conflict.

Some Iowa activist organizations called for an end to U.S. aid to Israel: Aya Salem, 27, who emceed a Des Moines rally last week for the Party of Socialism & Liberation, said, "Palestinians have a right to exist, and Palestinians have a right to defend themselves and they have the right to free themselves."

Jarad Bernstein, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Des Moines, responded: "Now's not the time to be protesting occupation. Now is the time to be condemning, full-throatedly, terrorism against civilians."

Ron DeSantis says America should 'supplement' Israel defense

DeSantis has turned his focus toward foreign policy while campaigning in Iowa. His speeches Saturday centered on the Gaza conflict and his plan to deter people from crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, and he answered questions about the war in Ukraine.

DeSantis said America's role in the Israel-Hamas conflict is to help from afar, rather than fight directly on Israel's behalf.

"They don't expect us to do what they should be doing for themselves," he said Saturday. "Anything we do supplements their own defense."

The Republican candidate was less enthusiastic about continuing military aid to Ukraine, as it enters the 19th month of its defense against Russia's invasion.

"I think people do not want a blank check for Ukraine or really anything else," DeSantis said as he critiqued President Joe Biden's requests for tens of billions of dollars in aid without — in DeSantis' view — having "produced a plan for success."

DeSantis said, "Anything I would do as commander-in-chief would have a concrete objective, and it'd be something that would be achievable. ... You owe it to the American people to know what you're going to do, define the mission and execute it. If you can't do that, people are not going to support it."

He added that the U.S. has done "almost as much in two years in Ukraine as we've done for the entire history of Israel, in terms of the support there."

Through the 2020 fiscal year, the U.S. provided Israel \$146 billion, mostly in the form of military assistance but also economic assistance between 1971 and 2007, according to the Congressional Research Service — more foreign assistance than for any other nation since World War II.

The U.S. had provided Ukraine with a total of \$76 billion in assistance as of early September, including more than \$40 billion in military support.

DeSantis said he plans to unveil his national security platform in Iowa later this month. He's been a frequent visitor to Iowa, and has visited 80 of the state's 99 counties.

What presidential hopeful Ryan Binkley said on Ukraine, NATO, China and developing nations

Phillip Sitter

Des Moines Register

Published online 16-Aug., 2023

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2023/08/16/presidential-candidate-ryan-binkley-speaks-on-ukraine-china-and-more/70589645007/>

Ryan Binkley — the Texas pastor seeking to be the Republican Party's presidential candidate — has often focused on domestic concerns in his political message, including at the Iowa State Fair.

But in addition to calls for action on the national debt, health care costs, pathways to legal status for undocumented immigrants and tighter border security, Binkley has spoken recently on the Russia-Ukraine War and U.S. position in NATO.

The Des Moines Register followed up with him on those topics and asked about what his administration's policies would be on other global issues.

Binkley is a first-time political candidate who leads Generational Equity Group — a mergers and acquisitions and business advisory group he co-founded and that's headquartered in Texas — and is the lead pastor of the Create Church in Richardson, Texas, that he co-founded.

Ryan Binkley on support for Ukraine: "I think it's a mistake to give unlimited funds."

Binkley told reporters after his Des Moines Register Political Soapbox speech Aug. 12 that "it's a mistake to give unlimited funds to Ukraine. I think we need to be able to stand with Ukraine, but also start leading the movement now to make NATO pay more and also bring a quick resolution to this war."

Asked if he thought Russian President Vladimir Putin could negotiate in good faith, Binkley replied, "To end the war, it's going to take everybody walking away feeling like you know what, there's some portion of this thing where they can go back to their people and say they were successful. I've been involved in over 1,400 mergers and acquisitions of businesses. It's no different."

The Register asked Binkley at the fair how realistic he thought the U.S. downsizing its role could be, given the scope of Ukraine's needs and NATO members' smaller defense capacities compared with the U.S.

Binkley said the U.S. and other NATO members should have a dialogue with Putin and Russia. "Let's find out what the big concerns are. He said in the past the reason he did it (invaded Ukraine) was because of NATO's expansion in the last 20, 30 years. And so maybe we can have

honest conversations about that. Maybe we can talk about other ways for them to succeed other than taking over more territory — give them reassurances that their border is secure."

President Biden and members of Congress from the Republican and Democrat parties have called Russia's conduct in its war against Ukraine genocide. Biden told reporters last year on a visit in Iowa as he prepared to return to the White House, "It's become clearer and clearer that Putin is trying to wipe out the idea of being Ukrainian."

On whether Russia should be allowed to walk away from the war with something, given its conduct being labeled genocide, Binkley said, "Yeah, I am not gonna address any specifics on that," but he added there are ways for Russia to feel secure in its borders and be presented with a path back into the international community, such as for "sanctions to be removed over time so they can have a pathway of success."

U.S. lacks the finances to do as much work in developing nations as it should, Binkley said, but China's influence should be countered

When it comes to support for developing nations and countering the influence of Russia, China and jihadi militant groups, Binkley said, "We don't have as much money to be charitable as we should."

However, Binkley said it's "the heartbeat of America to share freedom, to share charity, to help in any way we can, help other countries have infrastructure, and this is one of my struggles, because right now, China is taking a lead role in that," loaning money to nations in Africa and Latin America, and Brazil and India.

"I think once we fix ourselves securely here financially, we should be able to do all the more," he said.

Binkley said China and the U.S. can be mutually successful as economic powers but that must be on a level playing field, with fair trade and investment practices and protections for intellectual property.

"And in the meantime, we need to diversify our supply chains," including by building relationships with India, he said.

Binkley's church defines marriage as between a man and woman, but he also said his administration would be able and willing to speak out against laws in nations — many of which are in Africa, such as Uganda, and the Middle East — which criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts and have punishments that include prison and even death sentences.

He said, "There's many things that people can disagree with, socially, politically and (on) religion, but we need to treat people with fairness and equity."