

The Delray Democrat

Is Charlie Crist Our Joe Biden?¹

Michael K. Cantwell

Just as Ron DeSantis is a peanut-sized reflection of Donald Trump, the 2022 gubernatorial race is likely to mirror the 2020 presidential race. Nearing the size of the 2020 presidential primary field, seven Democrats have filed to run against DeSantis, and another seven are listed as potential candidates. Congressman and former Governor Charlie Crist and Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried appear to be the clear frontrunners.

Mariane Kulick, my aunt and founder of our Club, always had a soft spot for Crist, even when he was a Republican. What impressed her was his treatment of former offenders seeking clemency when he was governor. Although it was against his self-interest, as a substantial majority of the prison population consisted of Democrats, he granted clemency and restored the voting rights of 155,000 former offenders during his 4 years in office.

That is twice as many as received clemency under Jeb Bush during his 8 years as governor. Of course, neither Bush nor Crist comes close to the execrable Rick Scott, who granted clemency to fewer than 2,500 applicants during his 8 years. DeSantis is likely to win this race to the bottom, having granted clemency to fewer than 100 petitioners since being elected. He infamously refused to pardon Desmond Meade, a man with more humanity in his little toe than DeSantis possesses in his entire body.

Few of us who belong to what Paul Wellstone pointedly called “The Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party” supported Joe Biden in the 2020 primaries, and it’s fair to say that few will be lining up behind Crist in the primaries.

I was wrong about Biden, and I think that it would be wrong to dismiss Crist. A major factor in Biden’s success was the public’s perception of a race between a competent, decent human being and an incompetent, heartless miscreant.

The same contrast could play out in a Crist-DeSantis race. DeSantis can try to conceal his cruelty and incompetence, but it’s a thin veneer. The nightmares faced by Floridians applying for unemployment last year after Covid-19 caused massive layoffs can and must come back to bite him. So should DeSantis’s announced cutoff of the federal government’s \$300 supplemental

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, June 2021, p 7.

benefit this year as well as his botched vaccine rollout. By contrast, Crist was viewed as a competent governor and a decent man.

DeSantis ridicules Crist's two subsequent statewide losses, but the district Crist represents in Congress had been Republican for 60 years before he flipped it in 2016. That's three time as long as Republicans have held the governor's mansion. This is a race Crist can win. It is also a race we must win, whomever we nominate. *Vote Blue, No Matter Who.*