

The Delray Democrat

The Once and Future Governor¹

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Shortly after Charlie Crist announced his candidacy to occupy an office he'd held more than a decade earlier, I [suggested](#) he could be Florida's Joe Biden.

At that time, President Biden was off to the strongest start of any president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and even Republican columnists were calling him a [transformational president](#). Within months, however, news coverage shifted from Biden's still unrivaled record on job creation, unemployment reduction, and GDP growth to "all inflation all the time," and the comparison became one better avoided than trumpeted.

Indeed, as soon as Crist won his party's nomination, Ron DeSantis began flooding the airwaves with ads linking Crist to Biden, despite his [hypocritical attempts to take credit](#) for funds made available to Floridians through Biden's American Rescue Plan Act. After Biden's surge in popularity in late summer, however, the So-Called Liberal Media began looking for a new narrative, and shamelessly seem to have settled on the "[Republican Rebound](#)."

Regardless of Biden's impact on Crist's campaign, the parallels between the two men are powerful and potentially predictive. Most fundamental is that Crist, like Biden, is a decent, competent man running against an indecent, incompetent narcissist. The race between Crist and DeSantis is a race between a mensch and a miscreant.

As governor, Crist demonstrated his decency and humanity by restoring the rights of 155,000 Floridians permanently disenfranchised by a prior felony conviction. As a Republican, it wasn't in his political interest to do so because the former offenders were disproportionately people of color. (Permanently disenfranchising the formerly enslaved was precisely the intent of the Post-Civil War amendment to the Florida Constitution.) In his four years in office, Crist granted clemency to twice as many Floridians as Jeb Bush and 50 times as many as Rick Scott, each of whom served eight years.

In sharp contrast, DeSantis delights in indecency and cruelty. He bullied a schoolchild whose mother was immunocompromised into removing his mask, he sent a SWAT team to serve a warrant to seize the computers of a scientist who was fired from her government position after claiming she had been asked to manipulate coronavirus data, and he removed a democratically elected state attorney, dispatching an armed guard to escort him from his government office. Most recently, he duped Venezuelan immigrants seeking amnesty into boarding a plane for Martha's Vineyard with the false claim that jobs awaited them and without notifying local authorities. This

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cheap political stunt may also have broken [human trafficking](#) laws.

Most of all, like Trump, DeSantis seems to delight in himself. His narcissism, unselfconsciously displayed in his “Top Gov” campaign ad, drew comparisons to Michael Dukakis’s [tank top photo](#) while evoking contempt from [actual fighter pilots](#).

Biden and Crist were prematurely branded as losers. Biden twice failed to capture his party’s nomination for president, and Crist twice failed to win statewide elections after leaving the governor’s office and the Republican Party in 2010. Yet Biden was elected president in 2020. And in 2016, Crist flipped a Congressional district that had been Republican for 60 years, a seat he subsequently defended twice.

Biden entered office in the midst of the worst financial collapse since the Great Depression and the greatest public health crisis in over a century. Notwithstanding an evenly split Senate and a mere five-vote majority in the House, Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act within six weeks of his inauguration, propelling the economy to record increases in jobs and an unemployment rate not seen since 1969. Last month, he signed legislation that not only represents America’s largest investment in combatting climate change but also will substantially reduce the price Americans pay for pharmaceuticals.

In between Biden made good on his promise that bipartisanship was not dead, however quixotic that sounded to most observers. In addition to signing the infrastructure bill that had eluded his two predecessors, he presided over passage of the first gun safety legislation in nearly three decades, the biggest expansion of veterans’ benefits in over three decades, and an investment in microchip production that will make America competitive with China and decrease our reliance on foreign suppliers.

I look forward to similar achievements from Charlie when our once and future governor returns to Tallahassee in the time of our greatest need.