

OP-ED

DeSantis leaning on Elon Musk is a bad sign

By Kurt Bardella

WHEN THE WAY in which you are making an announcement (and the technical difficulties that ensued) overshadows the announcement itself, you're in big trouble. That's my takeaway from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' audio announcement via Twitter Spaces that he is officially seeking the Republican presidential nomination.

The first impression Americans will have of the DeSantis campaign is that he declared his candidacy on a platform that's been in a financial free fall ever since his announcement co-star, Elon Musk, took it over. There was no iconic image in front of American flags or video of him battling the harsh elements of winter, just a sanitized, controlled and unremarkable audio-only conversation with one of the world's richest men.

Don't get me wrong, on Twitter, DeSantis' announcement will get massive engagement. It will be one of the most consumed pieces of content of 2023 because Musk can make sure the back end of Twitter makes it so. But do not mistake views for votes.

I don't think I've ever seen a candidate enter a presidential contest under so much duress. The fact that there are those in the political media using words like "reset" to describe this moment underscores how underwhelming DeSantis has been as a candidate thus far. Since March, former President Trump has managed to double his lead over DeSantis to a formidable 33 percentage points. That tells me the entire premise of DeSantis' campaign is completely off base, in particular the flawed assumption that the Republican primary electorate was ready to abandon Trump in favor of a "Trump without the baggage" alternative.

DeSantis thought he could win over the Trump base without having to actually engage with him. Instead, Trump predictably unleashed an onslaught of haymakers against DeSantis that left him bloodied, bruised and cast as a lightweight not ready for prime time.

That's the thing about power and people like Donald Trump — they will not surrender it easily. You have to take it from them. Just ask Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, Scott Walker, Jeb Bush, etc. what happens when you try to run a conventional campaign

against Trump. What happens when you try to avoid the knife fight and hit him with jabs instead of uppercuts.

For DeSantis to have ever had a real chance, he needed to come out of the gates swinging directly at Trump. Pulling no punches, not holding back, an offensive blitz that would've put Donald on his ass for the first time in a Republican primary fight. Instead, DeSantis made the idiotic calculation that his most alpha-male persona would be better spent fighting an animated mouse than his chief rival for the prize he so desperately wants.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, but officially announcing a campaign for the highest office in the land is the closest thing you can get to getting a mulligan on that first impression if you choreograph it right. Limiting himself to audio and Twitter Spaces feeds into the narratives that DeSantis isn't a skilled enough politician to handle a contest of presidential pace and visibility. That an awkward loner who doesn't like to glad-hand people doesn't stand a prayer against the showmanship that has become the hallmark of Trump's persona. Hiding behind Musk only reinforces

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those whispers. You're running for president of the United States but you decide to share the stage with someone who is arguably more powerful and influential than you are — you're casting yourself as the supporting actor when you should be the lead.

An occasion like this would be the perfect opportunity to do something bigger, grander, but instead, DeSantis is just going through the motions. Consider that his big post-announcement appearance is a Fox News segment with Trey Gowdy, that has more of a "check the box" feel to it than any-

thing else. Again, underwhelming. Why not a town hall event with a live audience that can generate some energy, enthusiasm and emotion?

DeSantis regurgitated the laundry list of imaginary grievances that have become the hallmark of today's Republican Party and while the GOP primary electorate might agree with every word he said, the reality is it is already getting that act from Trump. DeSantis just comes off as a cheap knock-off. The fact that DeSantis didn't even directly take on his chief rival in his prepared remarks speaks volumes. Clearly, he doesn't believe he can actually land a glove on Donald. It begs the question, how in the world could he possibly expect to beat him in a primary?

If anyone out there was thinking DeSantis is the one to lead the GOP out of Trumpism, go back and listen to the first 25 minutes of his launch event and you'll get a reality check that should send you shopping for a new candidate immediately.

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MUD AND DEBRIS flow down charred hills in Ventura after an El Niño-fueled storm in 2015. JOEL ANGEL JUÁREZ Associated Press

The other climate change

DURING THE EL NIÑO of 1983, Californians counted their blessings. The warm Pacific waters sloshing eastward certainly brought heavy spring rains and record snow. But the state largely escaped the flood risks being frantically managed farther east.

That spring, engineers famously resorted to plywood to add just a few more inches to the 710-foot-high Glen Canyon Dam as they struggled to prevent the second-largest reservoir in the United States from being overtopped by El Niño-swollen waters. Back in California, a top flood official noted that it was "luck," not preparation, that spared the state a similar fate.

El Niño, a climate pattern driven by shifts in winds and currents in the tropical Pacific Ocean, is the stuff of nightmares the world over: Widespread crop failures, famine, disease, floods, extreme heat, droughts, wildfires and even violent conflict have all been linked to the recurring climate anomaly. We have long known that climate variations alter our overall economic well-being. But by how much? Knowing the answer is essential to predicting the impact of global warming and evaluating the true cost of inaction on climate change, which exacerbates the repercussions of El Niño.

A spate of research has been chipping away at an answer, revealing that the costs of tropical cyclones, temperature changes, heat waves and floods are far higher than we realized, increasing both the cost of inaction and the need to rapidly mitigate and adapt to climate change.

We evaluated the global macro-economic toll of El Niño and found that it's far greater than previously understood. The price tags of the 1983 and 1998 El Niño events, for example, are orders of magnitude higher than earlier estimates suggested, amounting to nearly \$4.1 trillion and \$5.7 trillion, respectively.

These are startling figures. El Niño's costs are so high because it is not just a short-term shock from which a region soon recovers. Rather, it depresses economic growth for up to a decade or more.

El Niño is back. For an overheated state and planet, the costs are likely to be monumental.

By Justin S. Mankin and Christopher W. Callahan

The costs of this enduring damage compound and grow exponentially over time.

A proper accounting of the costs of El Niño, and of climate damage more broadly, doesn't just consider direct damage from floods or droughts such as a washed-out bridge or diminished crop yield. It must contend with how the impacts of the phenomenon combine to depress long-term economic growth.

Our economic fate is tied to El Niño in many ways. Floods can endanger supplies of commodities and goods by halting mining operations and disrupting supply chains. Droughts can suppress water-intensive manufacturing and agricultural production. Weather disasters can lead to large insurance payouts with costs extending well beyond the event itself and throughout the global economy. All El Niño events are costly, and each El Niño is costly in its own way.

El Niño is expected to return this year. Policymakers, scientists, food security and development specialists, water managers and reinsurance firms are all bracing themselves for widespread weather and climate risks, including what is likely to be the hottest year on record, scorching past 2016 — the year of the last El Niño. If the median forecast for this year is correct, we anticipate that the global economy will face a more than \$3-trillion setback over the next five years, predominantly due to losses in the tropical countries most affected by El Niño.

Our global economy is far more vulnerable to climate than we realize. Luckily, scrutinizing the costs can help us prepare effectively.

First, we need to invest more in

El Niño prediction and early warning. Peruvian potato farmers have shown that long-range forecasts allow for adaptation. More notice of the phenomenon can help us shore up infrastructure, agriculture, supply chains and insurance such as through catastrophe bonds.

These types of adaptation investments will have the additional benefit of improving our resilience against global warming. El Niño happens even in the absence of people and greenhouse gas emissions. But now each El Niño amplifies the impacts of global warming, from droughts afflicting Indonesian palm oil plantations to floods inundating Chilean copper mines. The consequences of El Niño look a lot like those of global warming, so reducing our vulnerability to the former will increase our collective readiness for the latter.

Lastly, estimates of the future costs of climate change must account for the phenomenon. According to our estimates, global-warming-driven changes to El Niño will reduce worldwide income by about \$84 trillion by the end of the 21st century. This strengthens the imperative to reduce warming and its mounting costs.

Past El Niño events offer California and the nation a valuable lesson: Even if we set aside future warming, we are poorly adapted to the climate we have. Naturally occurring variations in weather and climate like those of El Niño can humble our infrastructure, depress our economies, increase the cost of our food and hurt people and communities. Climate has a way of highlighting our societal shortcomings, especially by reminding us who is most vulnerable and how we have failed to protect them.

In a cooler world, the costs of El Niño were enormous. In a warmer one, they're higher still. We can no longer rely on luck alone to save us. Preparing California, the nation and the global economy for the risks we face begins with an honest accounting of the cost of inaction.

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When the McCarthy spending cuts get spelled out, even the GOP balks

JACKIE CALMES

WHETHER YOU'RE for the demand by House Republicans for deep spending cuts as a condition for raising the nation's debt ceiling or you're against it, there are some things you should know in assessing their gambit.



Perhaps the single most important fact is this: While Speaker Kevin McCarthy likes to claim that his debt limit bill would break Democrats' "addiction to spending," the Republicans — whose own appetite for spending is well established — would subject just 13% of federal spending to the knife.

They've said they'll exempt national defense, some veterans programs, Social Security and Medicare, which amounts to about half of all spending. As for the portion they're targeting, so-called domestic discretionary spending, that relatively small part of the overall budget covers just about everything else the government does, and that Americans expect it to do.

So the predictable has begun: The Republicans are having trouble making good on their boasts of easy-peasy spending cuts.

In short, they're threatening the nation's first default, and the chaos that would follow, by demanding spending cuts that many of them don't truly want to become law.

We got evidence of the squeeze this week, even as McCarthy, in his on-again, off-again debt ceiling negotiations with President Biden, was full of budget-cutting bravado to reporters. Just before midnight on Monday — midnight! — the House Appropriations Committee canceled its Tuesday and Wednesday meetings when voting was scheduled on the first of the dozen bills that annually fund the federal government's operations. Those bills fill in the gory details of the spending cuts that Republicans left unidentified when they passed McCarthy's debt limit bill last month.

The stated reason for the postponement: The committee's Republican majority wanted to give McCarthy "maximum flexibility" in his talks with Biden.

The real reason: They didn't have the votes to pass their own bills. Failure, in turn, would have undercut McCarthy's leverage in the negotiations.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the senior Democrat on the committee, got her email canceling the meetings at 11:53 p.m. She called it "a sign of unraveling" among Republicans, given that the cuts they were finally specifying "are so staggering."

McCarthy's debt-limit bill calls for trimming 9% from the \$1.6 trillion that currently goes to annual discretionary spending. But with Republicans' promised exemptions for the Pentagon and some veterans programs, the cuts in what's left on the table would reach something close to a devastating 30%. Accounting for inflation, the reductions would be even greater.

Even then, the savings generated would be small relative to the nation's annual budget deficits. And Republicans, if they have their way, would in effect wipe out

those savings by extending all the Trump-era tax cuts for another decade, adding trillions more to the federal debt they purport to fear.

So what's included in the budget slice that Republicans want to carve up? The bills stalled in the Appropriations Committee by Republicans' infighting would cover spending for agriculture, including farm subsidies and nutrition programs; border protections and homeland security; a new program to assist veterans exposed to toxins during wartime; and the construction and maintenance of military facilities and housing, to name some.

Also on the Republicans' block in future appropriations bills: air traffic control; cancer and Alzheimer's research; Meals on Wheels; infrastructure in general; opioid treatments; Head Start; rail, food and drug safety; and much, much more. Although Social Security and Medicare wouldn't face cuts, good luck getting assistance once the programs' staffing is reduced.

"Washington cannot continue to spend money we do not have at the expense of children and grandchildren," McCarthy tweeted. Yet children, more than their grandparents drawing Social Security and Medicare, would be among the Americans most

Republicans are threatening default over spending cuts that many don't truly want to become law.

affected by the proposed cuts, and not just because of the reductions in education, nutrition, housing and healthcare programs that benefit many of them now.

At stake is the country they'll inherit. Economists and fiscal experts consider much of the spending that is at issue as "seed corn" investments in physical and human capital, with a proven return.

How the debt limit talks end is anyone's guess. I'm as concerned as the "scared" right-of-center experts I quoted months ago now that we're nearing the June deadline when the Treasury says it will no longer be able to borrow to meet obligations incurred by past presidents and Congresses.

Republicans say they'll make no concessions, that agreeing to raise the debt ceiling is concession enough. Really? Lifting the debt limit is their patriotic duty, especially considering their complicity in driving up the debt — fully a quarter of it during Donald Trump's presidency.

"I believe there are a number of members on the other side of the aisle that understand the hypocrisy here," DeLauro told me. "But they're not going to say anything." And consider this: Republicans want to raise the debt limit only enough to allow the Treasury to borrow through next spring. What then? They'll hold us up for more spending cuts.

That would be on top of the ones they're already having trouble producing, while threatening the nation with economic disaster.

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