

DeSantis restarts campaign after Hurricane Ian pause

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Three weeks after Hurricane Ian scrambled Florida's election in the closing stretch, Gov. Ron DeSantis ventured back out on the campaign trail over the weekend with appearances around the state.

DeSantis spoke at rallies in Tampa, The Villages and Coral Springs and at Biketoberfest in Daytona Beach.

Taking the stage with wife and children Sunday in The Villages retirement community as his "Sweet Florida" campaign song played, DeSantis asked the crowd: "Aren't you glad you live in the free state of Florida?"

DeSantis touted his administration's response to Ian.

While there have been questions about whether people in Lee County were given adequate time to evacuate, even President Joe Biden has praised DeSantis for how he handled Ian's aftermath and the governor was eager to highlight that record.

DeSantis talked about restoring bridge access to Sanibel Island and Pine Island, and getting electricity back on in hurricane ravaged areas.

"We've got a lot more work to do, but I'll tell you we've got great spirit in this state, we've got phenomenal people... when you see that kind of spirit you know we're going to be ok," DeSantis said.

The rest of the governor's 45-minute speech covered familiar territory, from his COVID-19 record to blaming Biden for high levels of inflation and illegal immigration.

DeSantis touched on Florida's 2020 election, noting the results were released quickly and criticizing states that took longer to count ballots, implying without evidence that they are doing something improper.

"You know it takes California and New York over a month to count the ballots, what are they doing in that month is what I want to know? Nothing good," DeSantis said.

DeSantis held a series of rallies in late August immediately after the primary to help jump start his campaign, but had done limited events before Ian took him off the campaign trail starting the last week of September. His weekend events appear to be the first public campaign events since the hurricane began threatening the state, although he continued to run television campaign ads.

The Nov. 8 election is three weeks from Tuesday.

U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist, the Democrat challenging DeSantis, also has been back on the campaign trail in recent days. Crist was in Palm Beach Gardens Sunday for a “Speaking Up for America Indivisible Pep Rally.”

Recent polls show Crist trailing DeSantis.