

Bulwark+

Florida's "Authoritarian Socialist" Governor

Plus, Why isn't the Jared payoff a bigger scandal?

Charlie Skyes

April 20, 2022

Need any more evidence that our politics is upside down?

Check out the exchange between Colorado's Democratic governor, Jared Polis, and Florida GOP Governor Ron DeSantis on the whole free market, private sector, small government thing.

"Florida's authoritarian socialist attacks on the private sector are driving businesses away," tweeted Colorado's Polis. **"In CO, we don't meddle in affairs of companies like [Disney] or [Twitter]."**

And he extended an invitation to the besieged businesses:

"Hey {Disney}, we're ready for Mountain Disneyland and [Twitter] we're ready for Twitter HQ2, whoever your owners are."

Jared Polis @jaredpolis

Florida's authoritarian socialist attacks on the private sector are driving businesses away. In CO, we don't meddle in affairs of companies like @Disney or @Twitter. Hey @Disney we're ready for Mountain Disneyland and @Twitter we're ready for Twitter HQ2, whoever your owners are
The Recount @therecount

Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL) threatens Twitter after it activated "poison pill" plan to prevent Elon Musk's acquisition: "We're gonna be looking at ways the state of Florida potentially can be holding these Twitter board of directors accountable for breaching their fiduciary duty."

<https://t.co/55OFO90AjJ>

April 19th 2022

1,869 Retweets **9,231** Likes

Polis was reacting to DeSantis's remarkable (although now more or less routine) threats to retaliate against a private employer. DeSantis has targeted Disney for legislative punishment because of its position on the state's new gender education law

On Tuesday morning, Florida State Representative Andrew Learned tweeted, "BREAKING: Governor DeSantis is seeking to turn today's Special Legislative Session into a full-scale attack on Walt Disney World and Mickey Mouse. This isn't a joke, this is 2022 and the modern Republican Party."

Polis responded:

Jared Polis @jaredpolis

We will grant Mickey and Minnie full asylum in Colorado <https://t.co/xpkqvEYoCu>

Rep. Andrew Learned @AndrewLearned

BREAKING: Governor DeSantis is seeking to turn today's Special Legislative Session into a full-scale attack on Walt Disney World and Mickey Mouse. This isn't a joke, this is 2022 and the modern Republican Party.

April 19th 2022

1,304 Retweets 9,995 Likes

Now Twitter is also in DeSantis's crosshairs.

As you undoubtedly know, billionaire Elon Musk has launched a hostile takeover bid for the social media firm. Twitter, like many American corporations who want to protect themselves from unwanted suitors, has approved a so-called "poison-pill" plan that would make Musk's takeover much more difficult. (Hyper-short version: the company floods the market with new shares which would dilute Musk's share, and give the board more say in the company's future.)

DeSantis's reaction provides a glimpse into his hall-of-mirrors thinking about free enterprise. In his remarks, he goes out of his way to blur the lines between a private business and government. He suggests that if Twitter is trying protect itself "for reasons of power and politics, **and basically to serve as a suppression arm of the government**, well then you're in a situation where, you know, you need some accountability there," said DeSantis. "First of all, that's not free market capitalism, when you have that, OK?" (Spoiler alert: yes it is.)

"That's a ruling junta that's using their policies to try to marginalize people that disagree with them," he said.

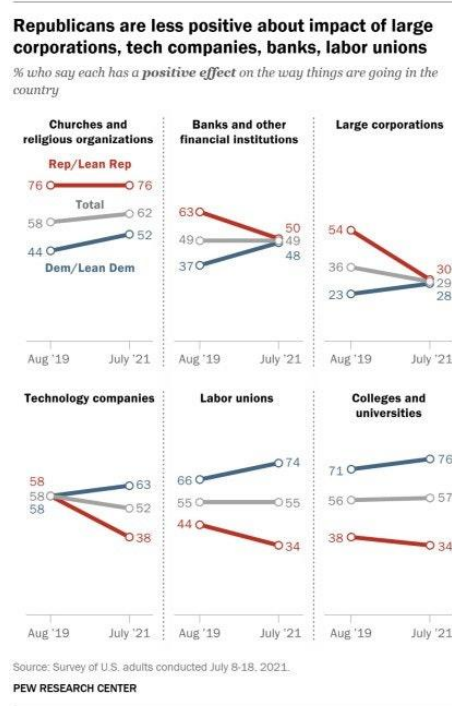
In other words, **Twitter's shareholders might view him as a liberator.**

Presumably they teach these things at Harvard Law School, DeSantis's alma mater. But the law is really not the thing for DeSantis, nor is the principle of free markets or capitalism. His concern about the company's breach of "fiduciary duty," is touching, but there are courts, and the SEC, and usually, these sorts of things are not resolved by politicians on the make.

Until about five minutes ago, Republicans understood — and pretended to care about — the line between the free market and state coercion. "Conservative" politicians routinely railed against proposals to have the government "pick winners and losers." But that was before our political world inverted itself.

Via Pew:

Since 2019, the share of Republicans who say large corporations have a positive impact on the way things are going in the U.S. has declined 24 percentage points, from 54% to 30%. Democrats have become slightly more positive toward corporations since then; positive views have risen from 23% to 28%. As a result, while there were wide partisan differences in these evaluations two years ago, there is not a significant gap today.



To be sure: there has always been corporate welfare, and with it the implicit threat that the Leviathan State might crush or cripple businesses who have lost the Favor of Heaven. But with the exception of Richard Nixon on a bad day, the mailed fist was usually kept discretely tucked away.

Now the fear or favor is out in the open. It's not simply a bug, it's the whole f*cking agenda.

DeSantis sees the latest controversy as another opportunity to inject himself — and the power of the state of Florida — into the culture wars, even if that means injecting the government directly into a private transaction; *even if that includes overt threats to punish private businesses for defying the agenda of the country's richest man.*

DeSantis made it clear that he is firmly allying himself with Musk, in part because they share the same enemies. “You notice the people that are the most hostile to Musk are people from these legacy media outlets like *Washington Post* and CNN and all these places,” said DeSantis. “Nobody trusts these people anymore, I tell you they lie every single day.”

Essentially what DeSantis is saying is: *give my gazillionaire buddy what he wants or I will use my power as governor to come after you.* What the cronyism lacks in subtlety it more than

makes up for in its brazen willingness to put government power behind the ambitions of a man of immense riches. **(Siri: Please define “oligarch.”)**

Which brings us to Polis’s tweet, which targeted Florida’s “authoritarian socialist attacks on the private sector.”

Do other Democrats see what’s he’s doing there?

Why the Hell Isn’t Jared Kushner’s \$2 Billion Saudi Payment a Big Scandal?

David Corn asks a good question.

It's damn hard to not see the \$2 billion investment as either a payoff for past services rendered or a preemptive bribe should Trump manage to regain the White House. And it could be both.

It’s a wonder that the disclosure of this deal hasn’t created more of a fuss and prompted congressional investigations. (Imagine what Republicans and Fox News would be doing if Hunter Biden received \$2 billion from a Ukrainian government leader who was responsible for the gruesome murder of an American resident.)

A 10-figure payment to a relative of a former president who is essentially the current (though undeclared) GOP frontrunner in the 2024 contest and possibly the next inhabitant of the White House is a major scandal.

Or it should be...

Whatever the past or future quid pro quos, if any, this deal stinks and demands congressional scrutiny. Allowing foreign authoritarians to shower billions of dollars upon family members of past, present, or future presidents is ethically wrong but carries a greater threat. As Ali Al-Ahmed, the director of the Institute for Gulf Affairs, wrote in the *Washington Post*, “The prospect of a dictator using his deep pockets to wield influence at the highest levels of the U.S. political system should be cause for serious concern and targeted action. Not all attacks on American democracy will take the shape of violent insurrections—the corruption of the Saudi-Kushner deal is an attack on democracy, too.”

Bonus:

The Republican Accountability Project @AccountableGOP

[This is what Republicans should have said about Jared Kushner’s Saudi deal.](#)

April 19th 2022

41 Retweets104 Likes

Quick Hits

1. Tucker Carlson and the Crisis of Masculinity

America needs more—and better—male role models, writes Mona Charen,

It's tempting to dismiss all of this as the pathetic bleats of hollow men who merit only derision. But as anthropologists, psychologists, and historians alike can testify, the male need for validation is universal, and when societies fail to offer constructive paths for masculine expression, they court backlash. The negative aspects of masculinity are always lurking just beneath the surface. As Hannah Arendt put it, "Every generation, civilization is invaded by barbarians. We call them 'children.'"

2. How Putin Conned the American Right

Shay Khatiri in today's *Bulwark*:

...Putin gave his annual State of the Nation address to the Duma. His speech centered on the report's conclusions, and gay marriage featured prominently:

We know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilization in every nation for thousands of years: the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity.

The speech made Putin an icon in segments of the right. Pat Buchanan and Franklin Graham wrote op-eds praising him as a new standard-bearer for Christian values. Graham even traveled to Moscow to meet him. Christian groups such as the World Congress of Families began developing stronger associations with Russia, and conservatives on social media began to publicly express support for Putin as an avatar of social conservatism.

Cheap Shots

Pat Buchanan's take aged badly.

Walter Olson @walterolson

Like Patrick Buchanan, for example. "In the culture war for the future of mankind, Putin is planting Russia's flag firmly on the side of traditional Christianity."
theamericanconservative.com/vladimir-putin.../2**Vladimir Putin, Christian Crusader? - The American Conservative**
In his Kremlin defense of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Vladimir Putin, even before he began listing the battles where Russian blood had been shed
ontheamericanconservative.com

April 14th 2022

46 Retweets**208 Likes**