



Draining the Swamp Starts with Stopping the Revolving Door

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Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.) warns that lawmakers cashing in as lobbyists and a permanent, highly paid federal bureaucracy is where the Washington swamp is at its worst.

DeSantis shares President Donald Trump's commitment to "drain the swamp" and is backing numerous legislative proposals to make it happen. Both men believe the federal government is too big and rewards bureaucratic and political empire building.

"Really, the whole economy in this area is fueled by the growth of government, the fact that you have more rules and regulations, which is a cottage industry for lobbying, lawyers and things like that," DeSantis told LifeZette in a recent interview. "Those are just the incentive structures that exist, and I think a lot of the problems in terms of the behavior in the swamp is just driven by those incentives."

It's no coincidence that a half-dozen of America's richest counties are in the region of Washington, D.C., making it a company town for government.

Much of the region's economy is driven by lawmakers and staffers helping special interests while hoping to get a plush K Street lobbyist job, DeSantis said.

"You see it in a variety of ways," DeSantis said. "Obviously, if you have a 2,000-page bill going through Congress, there is an opportunity for someone to put a little ornament on the Christmas tree that benefits someone on K Street. It's not just members of Congress — some of these staffers are involved. They can push for some of this stuff and then go from \$150,000 to making maybe half a million on K Street."

Trump unveiled a five-point ethics plan to drain the swamp in an October 2016 campaign speech, including a five-year lobbying ban for former lawmakers and staffers that DeSantis has put into a legislative proposal, the Drain the Swamp Act of 2018.

“One thing he said that I’m a big supporter of doing is term limits. So I’m the lead sponsor of the more popular term limits bill, the one Trump endorsed,” DeSantis said. “I would love to have a vote on that but obviously, there is resistance to that. And the other stuff he talked about, more along the lines of ethics reform, we basically took that and turned it into the Drain the Swamp Act.”

The bill prohibits executive and legislative branch officials from lobbying for five years, and DeSantis notes that 42 percent of former congressmen and 50 percent of senators leave government to become lobbyists. Only 3 percent did so in 1974. Overall, the Center for Responsive Politics found, 430 former senators and representatives are currently working as lobbyists.

DeSantis wants to stop the revolving door of lobbyists and lawmakers, but he’s seen little public appetite for reform. He thinks Trump administration officials fear offending members of Congress who benefit from the swamp.

“I think there’s been a fear that if you put that on the floor people are going to get upset,” DeSantis said. “Now, my response to that is, things like that, that are very popular, so what if the members don’t like it? They’re going to have to vote for it because it’s suicidal to vote the other way.”

DeSantis points to the nearly 2 million white-collar federal workers who drive up costs and who are almost impossible to fire.

“You look at the bureaucracy and how bureaucracy operates,” DeSantis said. “There’s basically no way you get fired for poor performance; it’s a permanent bureaucracy. If they don’t like certain elements of policy that one administration is doing, they can just wait them out and continue doing what they are doing. There aren’t a lot of consequences. So it’s really a permanent political class between the bureaucracy, the lobbying community, the elected officials, and it’s a problem.”

Downsizing the Federal Government, a project of the libertarian Cato Institute, found that the average federal worker earns 80 percent more than private sector workers with benefits included. It also found that wages and benefits for executive branch civilian workers cost \$276 billion in 2017.

DeSantis wants to make it easier to remove poor performers in the workforce, as Trump and Congress did earlier this year at the Department of Veterans Affairs after hundreds of veterans died while waiting for care.

“If you look at what we’ve done at the VA, in empowering the secretary to fire people for bad performance,” DeSantis said. “You need that across the whole government.”