

Fighting ‘Donorism’: Will DeSantis Fall Behind Ramaswamy?



by Roger L. Simon

The question “Will Ron DeSantis soon fall behind Vivek Ramaswamy?” may be premature—for now—but former President Donald Trump is already using that possibility in a Truth Social posting that taunts the Florida governor. (DeSantis’s criticism of the potential Alvin Bragg indictment of Trump over the Stormy Daniels payment, it should be noted, was less than full-throated.)

“Ron DeSanctimonious is dropping in the Polls so fast that he soon may be falling behind young Vivek Ramaswamy,” the former president wrote, adding later, “Nothing good happens when you are a disciple of Super RINO Paul Ryan.”

Speaking of Ramaswamy, as it happens, I spent the better part of two days last weekend motoring around South Carolina with the man his own press releases call an “outsider candidate.” I had never met him before.

I had opinions about what to expect. Some were right and some were wrong.

I knew he was wicked smart from spontaneous speeches.

I had seen him on television and knew that he had made a fortune as a biotech entrepreneur.

The former proved to be true. This is a man who can bang out a detailed Wall Street Journal op-ed on his laptop about the Federal Reserve’s destructive free market meddling in what seemed to be less than five minutes, while riding along in an SUV, simultaneously talking on the phone to a university professor and carrying on a conversation with the four other people in the car, and have the article be first rate.

I know—I watched it happen.

Ramaswamy told me, “I love writing.” Already a best-selling author—by himself, for once—I don’t think he’s going to need speech writers.

He also apparently has little use for professional political strategists, those overpaid adjuncts to major campaigns that often end up dictating what candidates should say—and usually, out of fear for their jobs, guiding those candidates to the most conventional, “safe,” and therefore unproductive decisions.

Of course, to have a successful campaign does involve all sorts of planning, publicity—he already has a good publicist—and so forth, so you do have to have a genuine, functioning apparatus, but it’s clear that Ramaswamy wants to run his own campaign, drawing from the expertise of others but

not being guided by it.

As for that fortune, I never asked Vivek his net worth. My grandmother told me that was bad manners. But like the bulk of humanity, I am connected to our friendly enemy, the internet, where at least one site (Forbes) claims he is worth \$600 million from his entrepreneurialism (attempting to cure Alzheimer's, no less, other diseases as well).

That should be more than sufficient to get at least a good distance into self-financing a presidential campaign, even in these days of outlandish costs.

Nevertheless, according to a March 21 statement from his campaign, he's doing well on the fundraising front, stating, interestingly, "Nearly a third of Vivek 2024 reported donors are new or first-time digital political donors." Ramaswamy has been deliberately asking for support at much lower numbers, even \$1, than the typical candidate.

This prompted me to ask him about something many have found both disturbing and ironic in our culture. We have come to a point where it seemed you had to be someone of significant wealth, a billionaire or near, such as Ramaswamy or Trump, in order to have the courage unabashedly to speak the truth as you saw it, especially on the political stage, but other places as well (See: Elon Musk).

It was only those candidates with their own "dough-re-mi" that couldn't be touched, were free of the influence and vetoes of donors, who had become effectively a class of their own, a donor class, practically the dominant ruling class in America that worked through the Democratic Party and the more traditional wing of the Republican, aka the Uniparty.

This made their candidates prey to what Ramaswamy called, in a spur-of-the-moment neologism when we were talking—"donorism."

He realized, and it's obvious that Trump also realized from

his recent Truth post, that this reliance on the donor class was a criticism that could be leveled against DeSantis. The Florida governor has been reported to have been meeting with the wealthy establishment supporters of the Bush family who look askance, to put it mildly, on Trump and probably soon will be on Ramaswamy as well, if they aren't already.

Although he is plunging ahead with his candidacy, Ramaswamy told me he was personally disturbed that only the mega-rich were free of excessive donor influence. Indeed, it keeps him up at night, he said.

He was looking for alternatives and had studied one recommendation that every citizen be given a stipend to contribute to the campaign of their choice, but finally rejected the idea.

The rap against Ramaswamy, I had been told by people who are "veterans of many campaigns," is that he's perhaps too smart, spoke too quickly, for hoi polloi (the Republican masses) to spark to him.

They also said he was too young, unseasoned. He should bide his time.

Although I'm twice his age (he's 37), that second argument means little to me. Who cares? I agree with Ramaswamy. We have been and should be again a meritocracy. Forget age.

The Founding Fathers, with the exception of Benjamin Franklin (70), were the same or even younger than Vivek at the beginnings of our republic.

Alexander Hamilton was 21 when he signed the Constitution; Thomas Jefferson was 33 when he penned the Declaration of Independence.

Sorry, Vivek. You're too old. (Kidding, obviously.)

That first criticism, basically an anti-intellectual argument

against him, ironically came from people whom I often considered snobbish or elitist themselves, but still I suspect it might contain a kernel of truth. Occasionally, I had watched Ramaswamy rattle off facts on television with the rapidity, ease, and, possibly off-putting for voters, confidence of a Jeopardy winner.

Wrong, again. Meeting him in person and, equally, if not more, importantly, watching him interact with many people from party regulars at a Charleston Republican convention to parishioners at a black church in Manning, South Carolina, this man is indeed what's known as a people person.

His interest in others didn't appear—as it does so often with politicians—to be manufactured. He genuinely wanted to know what everyone thought and enjoyed interacting. He thrived on it.

I saw this notably at the Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church that wasn't entirely black—there was a handful of whites present—although the service had the usual gospel-bluesy accompaniment associated with the black church.

Ramaswamy gave a spontaneous speech that didn't pander to anybody—no phony Southern accent à la Hillary; in fact, it contained a reference to French mathematician/philosopher Blaise Pascal—but demonstrated a deep religious feeling that drew a warm and emotional response from his audience.

The pastor, Rev. Leon Winn, had already told Ramaswamy that, if he ran, the other side for once couldn't accuse the Republican candidate, an Indian American, of being a racist.

(I liked the reverend—who described himself as the only black Republican pastor in that part of South Carolina—but doubted that. The Los Angeles Times was perfectly able to call the black Larry Elder a “white supremacist” when he ran for California governor.)

Regarding Trump's taunt, he may be correct that Vivek constitutes a greater threat to DeSantis than he does to him. Ramaswamy has positioned himself, to some degree, as more MAGA than Trump, calling for the complete dismantling of the FBI and the use of our military to annihilate the Mexican drug cartels. (Both seem to want to do away with a number of government agencies.)

No doubt he will be providing more details as the campaign progresses. Presumably, he would replace the FBI with something more responsive to the public and less inclined to spy on us. We desperately need it.

But the fight against pernicious "donorism" and all it implies for our country may, in the end, be a better "lane," to use that recent term of political art, for the outsider candidate.

I departed from Ramaswamy on that Sunday afternoon with regret. Besides the obvious degree to which he's elevating discussion in our politics, he was definitely a fun guy to hang with. But he was off to spend some cherished family time with his 3-year-old and 8-month-old children and his wife, Apoorva, herself a distinguished laryngologist and cancer specialist. It's a heady family.

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