



# BUILDING A FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE: A CONVERSATION WITH FLORIDA GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS

**Charles Gasparino 00:01**

Governor, thanks for joining us.

**Ron DeSantis 00:03**

Yeah. Good to be here.

**Charles Gasparino 00:04**

So, right off the bat, how much are you paying Zohran Mamdani to do such stupid stuff to bring people to your state?

**Ron DeSantis 00:18**

I'm always asked about, "Oh, Florida's doing this, Florida's doing this." "How did you do this? How did you do that?" "Oh, you did that." And yes, we are proud of policy. We think we've gotten it right, and we've done a lot of good stuff. But the reality is I do have a lot of help. If you wanted to give "Realtor of the Year", I wouldn't pick anybody in Florida. I would pick mayors in New York and Chicago and some of these governors. They're basically the best ambassadors for Florida that we could ever ask for, and we've seen it,

and people have voted with their feet. And in some respects, it's good to see people respond to good policy. But just as an American, and I've got to say, I don't think it's good that one guy gets elected mayor and then people feel like they have to flee the city. That is not a good thing for our country, but we've definitely seen it. And I think the thing that has frustrated a lot of people—so Chicago's had problems, right? During COVID, they had Lightfoot. A lot of people were complaining. We'd have people come down to Florida all the time. And they responded to all those problems not by correcting problems, but electing somebody who was exacerbating the problems. And I think when people see that, they just don't have confidence that things can get turned around politically.

**Charles Gasparino** 01:28

So, you're not paying them?

**Ron DeSantis** 01:30

I'm not paying them, but I do give credit where credit's due.

**Charles Gasparino** 01:33

Okay. "Realtor of the Year," Zohran Mamdani. His first private sector job, by the way. You know he recently stepped up his attacks on wealth creators. He stood outside a guy that gives a lot of jobs to New York, a guy named Ken Griffin from Citadel. When that happened, it was kind of, I think, a point where a lot of business people in New York said, "What are we doing here?" This occurred about a month ago. Did you see any uptick in people calling your office saying, "We might move down"?

**Ron DeSantis** 02:05

I've definitely heard a lot of concern about that. Look, it's one thing to have the view and the policies. The economic worldview has been tried. It has failed. It will not work. Just like the wealth tax they're trying to do in California. It's already failed because it's caused massive amount of wealth to flee California. It hasn't even been enacted and people are leaving. But we know if implemented, it will actually lose revenue because people change their behavior. So we know the policies that that mayor ran on are not going to be successful. But I would say it takes it to another level when you show up in front of somebody's house and target them personally. That's taking it to a point where, is it reasonable to then think, "Maybe this is someplace, maybe they don't want me around here. Maybe it's not someplace I was go..." And I always get asked about different people that have moved, and just with Ken, I point this out because it's true. Yes, he brought jobs, business, all that, tax base, great, great right. But he has given probably hundreds of millions of dollars philanthropically to organizations in Florida, which if he wasn't a Florida resident, would probably give them somewhere else. And so I'm happy to take that generosity, and if these people want to scare off more folks like that, you can come to Florida and you'll do well.

**Charles Gasparino** 03:24

He's given a lot of money to New York City philanthropically, too. I'm wondering, will Brickell, which is the big road in Miami, become the next Wall Street? I know a lot of people are moving down there.

**Ron DeSantis** 03:38

So, I've had people tell me, if you look 25 years from now, you'll see Miami be, have a larger role in all this, and that may happen. I mean, look, New York City has been the epicenter of finance in this country for over a century. That's not something that just gets unwound overnight. When people are not happy with the current mayor, I'm not seeing necessarily big banks say we're leaving New York, but their growth strategy is maybe grow more in Texas or maybe grow more in Florida. I think you'll continue to see that. And you and I were talking about it beforehand, but just that politically, if you don't like the direction the city has gone with the current mayor, the problem is that the people who get alienated by that and leave tend to be the voters you would need to try to turn it around. So, you end up really doubling down on that. And so if that keeps happening, I do think you're going to continue to see more and more movement. But Miami's had a great run. It's a great city in many respects, but don't sleep on Palm Beach and what's happened in West Palm. Stephen Ross has done a lot to expand that downtown. We're putting a lot of money in for infrastructure. It's a different speed than Miami, but it's very good quality of life as well.

**Charles Gasparino** 04:53

You think it might be a Florida stock exchange in the future?

**Ron DeSantis** 04:55

Well, it's interesting. I had the Texas Stock Exchange guys down to Miami, we did a little event about the Sun Belt that we called the Boom Belt, and it could be something that people may want to do at some point in the future. So, we're open to it.

**Charles Gasparino** 05:09

That sounds great. Okay, in keeping with the theme of this, which is essentially building a future-ready workforce, what are your building blocks for that? You're big into school choice. Is that kind of a pillar of this strategy?

**Ron DeSantis** 05:23

It is, but when I became governor, I thought about this as somebody that went to college and law school at some of these named places, and I'm not saying don't do that, but we had huge demand—if we wanted to build more manufacturing—for skilled labor. And what we were seeing at that time—I think it's true today—you graduate high school with a certification in welding or HVAC; you're making good money right away. You have a chance to maybe even open your own business in a growing state like Florida. So, we said we want to be number one in workforce education by 2030. And so we instituted a lot of policies to promote vocational education, and we didn't get number one by 2030. We got number one by 2025. So, in Florida, you can graduate high school with certifications. We've expanded things like truck driving, commercial licenses. There's kids that will graduate high school on the space coast of Florida with certification in aviation mechanics who will go work for SpaceX. They're working for Elon Musk. So I'm supportive of traditional higher education. Our higher education has done well, our public institutions in Florida, compared to where they were 20, 30 years ago. But there's more than one way to acquire knowledge and skills that doesn't involve a four-year brick-and-ivy university. So we've embraced vocational, and I think it's paid big dividends. And if I want a company to bring manufacturing to Florida, yeah, we have good tax, we have good regulatory, we have all that. Everybody knows that. But what about workforce? Are they going to be able to get the types of folks they need to power these businesses? And what we've shown is an ability to make that happen.

**Charles Gasparino** 07:05

That's what I love about you. You actually answered my second question. Well you know, my parents are vocational school people. My dad went to a vocational school in the Bronx. My mom did as well, secretary, mechanics, and it was a steppingstone from working class, or actually poverty, to the working class and the middle class. Is there any way that you can—at the high school level—maybe provide scholarships for people to go into those vocational schools? Because what I found interesting is that they are AI-proof, and some people, even after high school, could go to those vocational schools.

**Ron DeSantis** 07:44

Yes. So first of all, we do do that. We've doubled the number of apprenticeships. You could be high school or one of our state colleges, and you can be working at some of these businesses. School districts will work with companies because Florida's a diverse state. Central Florida has certain things that Northeast Florida doesn't do or different than Southern Florida, so you can tailor things appropriately. But I do think as AI—look, you hear different people, what some people say, "It's going to take all the jobs." Some people say it's going to do this. The reality is if you are in a more white-collar position that is susceptible to automation, I think you are going to be more at risk than somebody who's got to go in and fix your pipes in your house or something like that. And in Florida, even before AI really started taking off, we were already seeing huge demand for that. So we've done that in both our state colleges and our high schools, and it's just something that I think we've got to do, and we've got to do it nationwide. But it goes back to—part of it is policy. Part of it is, though, social stigma. When I was growing up and I was going to high school, I was told, "If you don't go to college, you're not going to be successful. You need a college degree to be able to succeed in this world." And I don't think that that was based on poor motivation. I think people wanted to set you on a course for success. But I think what it's done is it pushed a lot of students into traditional

brick-and-ivy universities. Some of them went deep into debt. Many of them didn't end up getting the degree, and it actually wasn't the right decision. But they were told, "Well, if you don't do college, somehow you're lesser." You are not lesser. In fact, oftentimes that can be smarter to go a more vocational route than to do a degree in zombie studies and end up \$100,000 in debt. It's just not something that you need. I think people are starting to get that more and more, and you see the number of males that are going to college has declined in recent years. I don't actually think that's a bad thing. I think they're making rational decisions about where they need to acquire skills that can then apply to workforce. And there is an opportunity on those core skilled trades to become an entrepreneur. Tell you, in Florida, you open up an HVAC company, you open up some of these small electric, you will do very well because the population's growing, and there's demand for it.

**Charles Gasparino** 10:11

I once heard you talk about the transformation of Florida from what it is today, which is a lot of wealth down there. You grew up in a working-class area. How can you explain that? It seems like it's night and day from when I remember Florida back in the '80s and what it's like today.

**Ron DeSantis** 10:29

So, I was growing up on the west coast of Florida in a town called Dunedin, and it was blue collar. My parents were blue collar. I was a baseball player. I get recruited by a number of schools, including where I ultimately went, Yale University. So I show up my first day as a freshman at Yale wearing jean shorts, a T-shirt, and flip-flops because that's what Florida people did. That's not quite what they did up in New England, so it was a real culture shock. But that's kind of the Florida that I grew up in. And in some respects, although there was a lot of great things about it, we did have a reputation for other things as well. And I think what's happened is we're no longer just about tourism and agriculture. That's what it was when I was growing up for decades it was. We've become strong in finance. We've obviously done very well in defense over the years. Now aviation, aerospace, we're number one in that. There's no question. So that's been interesting. But this is a fact. Since I've been governor in 2019, more income has moved into the state of Florida than has ever moved into another American state in the entire history of the Republic, even adjusted for inflation. And you know it's not really even close. Texas, I think, is second to us over this period, and we're three-to-four X what moved into Texas. And Texas is an economic powerhouse. So, it has really been a unique time in the history of the state, and the transformation really increases the potential for the state going forward.

**Charles Gasparino** 12:01

Building a future-ready workforce involves affordability, obviously. Do you worry that Florida's becoming unaffordable for some of your residents?

**Ron DeSantis** 12:10

Well, here's just the truth. What can government do to make the state affordable? What government can do, we do. We don't have an income tax. Say, like California obviously has an income tax. We have a sales tax, but our sales tax is lower than California's, which is 9 percent. Ours is 6 percent, and we exempt groceries, medication, and baby items for poor people especially, which makes a difference. In-state tuition at Florida universities is the lowest in the United States. It's about \$6,300 a year, and it has not gone up one penny since I've been governor. Now, if you look at home prices, home prices have gone up everywhere since COVID. It's not just Florida. But you used to be able to move from Los Angeles, sell a house, and buy three times the house in Jupiter and probably still have money to spare. You can't really do that anymore. Those values have gone up. Miami values have gone up. That's something I think the market works out. When it goes up quickly, there's usually a correction. The thing that we're working on now that I think will help people is—how are people being pinched? Grocery, I mean, gasoline in California. I couldn't even imagine paying \$6.30 a gallon. Florida's now over \$4. It's the most it's been in probably two or three years. So people feel that. It's harder to afford a home because home prices have gone up. Taxes, though: the one tax that we're working on is the property tax. In Florida, we have this homestead system where if you live in Florida, you can homestead one of your properties. If you have multiple, you've got to pick one. If you only have one, you should definitely homestead it, and it limits the valuation increases. But you still have people that have trouble with the property tax, especially if they bought at a high tax basis. So we're working on giving 100 percent exemption for homesteaded Florida residents, and that would basically recognize the fact that 2019 when I became—this is all local. None of it goes to the state, but local governments were taking in \$32 billion in property tax revenue. This is all the services, schools, police, everything. Now they're taking in \$60 billion. And so it's like, wait a minute. Yes, we've had population growth. Yes, we've had inflation, but that wouldn't put you at \$60 billion. So, would it be better to limit their ability to tax the homestead? They can still tax the Airbnb, the Canadians, the commercial like they're doing now, but it would help limit the growth of local government and then provide people a major, major break from doing it. I just have a problem with the idea that you own a home and you've got to keep writing a check to the government. It's an unrealized gain. They raise the value of your home, and all of a sudden you owe more. And when do you actually own your home? So we're working on getting that on the ballot in November in Florida. Voters will have a chance to approve it. We're going to work it out. So, when you say, "Oh, you're not going to have this." Trust me, I know how to—we're going to work it out. We'll help the local governments get through. But it's doable in Florida, and I think that's the thing we can do the best. Look, I wish I could have a policy prescription to just lower the price of groceries in half. But I mean, Mamdani wants to do the grocery stores. I know that's not the role of government—

**Charles Gasparino** 15:26

—So no grocery stores in Florida.

**Ron DeSantis** 15:28

—It just wouldn't work, right? But the property tax, if that's something we can do to be beneficial, I think it'd be revolutionary.

**Charles Gasparino** 15:34

Your budget is \$117 billion. By contrast, I think New York City, not state, is \$127 billion.

**Ron DeSantis** 15:43

New York State is more than twice the budget of Florida, and we have almost four million more residents than New York.

**Charles Gasparino** 15:49

If you're going to cut the property tax, how can you p—

**Ron DeSantis** 15:51

—Well, we don't get any property tax. It's all local. Yeah. So basically, if you have property tax, the homestead's 30 percent of all the revenue. And you may not be able to do it day one, maybe, but if you just did it, that's 30 percent of the revenue that would stop, but that's still \$15 billion more than they were spending in 2019 when they were spending \$30 billion. So it could be done. And we have a big surplus. I'm willing to help the local governments get through. But I'll tell you, California did Prop 13, and that benefited a lot of people for a long time. I know they've tried to undo it since then. But that was a huge taxpayer revolt against rising property taxes. We're in a situation in Florida—I've got some places in Florida where property values have probably tripled since 2019. Well, this is a home you bought. You thought you were going to pay a certain amount of tax, and now you're paying a lot more. It also hurts the real estate transactions. Because if you're someone that's older, you got a big house, you want to downsize, buying that condo, you may have a higher tax basis, and you pay more tax for a smaller house. So people don't want to do it.

**Charles Gasparino** 16:57

All right. I shouldn't have bought in South Carolina. I shouldn't have went down there if you're going to lower my property taxes. But I want to switch gears a little bit. You're on President Trump's committee to reform college sports. You and Randy Levine, I guess are the vice chairmen of these things. The president's the chairman. College sports is crazy, the business side. This whole thing called Name, Image, Likeness. Student athletes are staying in school for seven years, making millions of dollars. It's depriving donor funds from other sports. It's a mess. Where do you think this goes?

**Ron DeSantis** 17:30

I actually think we may be able to get something done. So "President," I said, "Are you going to do anything about NIL?" And he's like, "Yeah, I want to." He's like, "You should talk to Randy, help us out." So I got guys like Nick Saban and Urban Meyer and Condi Rice and some of these people. Randy knows a lot of people. So they got a great group together. We did an event at the White House and basically called for Congress to address—probably needed an antitrust exemption to do it—but address eligibility. If you take a SNAP when you're 18, you aren't playing until you're 27. Transfer: you may get one transfer, but to be perpetually a free agent doesn't work, so fix the transfer portal. And then NIL should be if someone wants to pay you to endorse their product or use your name, image, likeness, that's your business. But having a university collective where the athletes will go, "Hey, Coach, I just threw for 300 yards. I need another half a million dollars." "Oh, no? Okay, well, I'm going to transfer and go somewhere else." That doesn't work. And what's happened is exactly what you said. Donors now have to put in a lot more money. And so it used to be football would carry everything. Well, now football has become so much more expensive. Schools are cutting sports. You just saw Arkansas cut tennis. You're going to see more pressure on Olympic sports, other non-revenue sports. I played baseball for four years for Yale, and I can tell you most of the athletes I knew there were not playing professionally, although some of them did and had good careers. But I believe that athletics is an important part of learning how to fail, learning leadership, learning teamwork, and I just think it would be bad if all these sports wither on the vine. So those are really the issues, and I think they are getting some traction in the Senate. And if you end up getting 60 senators on board with it, then I think you'll get legislation through this year.

**Charles Gasparino** 19:17

And your partner in crime, Randy Levine, tells me he thinks he has Democrats on this.

**Ron DeSantis** 19:22

100 percent. I mean, think about it. You've got two Democrat senators in Georgia. You think Georgia voters want to see this fixed? Yes. You've got two Democrat senators in Michigan. You think Michigan voters—So there's states that have big college sports programs that are going to want to see it done. So six months ago, I wasn't optimistic. Now I'm cautiously optimistic. There's some more work that needs to be done, but I do think it's moving in the right direction. And so hopefully we'll be able to do it. I think it'll be better for the integrity of the sports, and not just football, but all the other sports.

**Charles Gasparino** 19:55

We're going to get the hook in a minute—or a few minutes—but I want to ask you—I think it'd be malpractice if I didn't—your term ends in January. What's next for you?

**Ron DeSantis** 20:06

I've never been asked that question before.

**Charles Gasparino** 20:10

Sometimes it's the obvious questions that are the best.

**Ron DeSantis** 20:13

Yeah. Look, I'm somebody that I run through the tape. So, I mentioned the property tax battle. That's going to happen in the next six months, right? I've got all these other things, and so we'll be very active all the way through January of 2027. And then we'll look to see kind of what we want to do. I've got a lot of people offering a lot of different things, saying, "You should do this, you should do that," and I appreciate it. But I also think that to take my eye off the ball of doing the job I've had for seven years, and a job I've been proud to have, and have actually made a difference. Look, I was a US congressman for three terms. I've recovered from that experience entirely trust me. I was a US—and I did more in one week as governor than I did—I worked hard, too—than I did in those six years. What we've been able to do, to this day, people will come up to me, "Thank you for saving my business during COVID," "Thank you for giving the school choice scholarship," "Thank you for the law enforcement." But whatever it is, you do have an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, and I just feel like as long as I have time on the—it's just like Churchill. He was speaking at the Women's Temperance Society of London, and the head of the organization went up to him, and this was after he had won World War II and everything, had a long career. She said, "Prime Minister, Prime Minister, we have great regard for your statesmanship, but we are very disfavorable about your drinking habits. If you added up all the wine and brandy and whiskey you've drunk, it would almost fill to the top of the ballroom." And Churchill looked up, saw there would be space left. He said, "Well, how much more to do and how little time to do it." So that's kind of my position.

**Charles Gasparino** 21:52

So, are you going to run for president?

**Ron DeSantis** 21:54

Who knows? You never know. I'm 40. I'm in my mid-40s. '28, maybe beyond that, I think that there's a lot of runway. I think what I will be able to say, just from our party—Republican party—is: who took a state that had more Democrats than Republicans by 300,000 when he got elected and now has 1.5 million more Republicans? Who had a state that had a trillion-dollar economy and now has \$1.8 trillion? Who had a state that had some school choice, now universal; 50-year low in the crime rate? So we've got a good story to tell, and we're proud of the leadership we've been able to provide.

**Charles Gasparino** 22:29

Okay, the most important question here for me, my family. Spent some time in New Haven, obviously. Frank Pepe's, the best?

**Ron DeSantis** 22:37

Pepe's was my first ever experience with 10 out of 10 pizza, and it really changed my... I grew up in Florida eating Papa John's. So, to go from Papa John's to Frank Pepe's—

**Charles Gasparino** 22:49

And you're Italian—

**Ron DeSantis** 22:50

—It's a big deal.

**Charles Gasparino** 22:51

Anyway, thank you.

**Ron DeSantis** 22:52

Thank you. Appreciate it.

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