

DeSantis ad attacking Trump is derided as homophobic

By Jill Colvin
Associated Press

NEW YORK >> A prominent group that represents LGBT conservatives says a video shared by Ron DeSantis' presidential campaign that slams rival Donald Trump for his past support of gay and transgender people "ventured into homophobic territory."

The "DeSantis War Room" Twitter account shared the video Friday — the last day of June's LGBTQ+ Pride Month — that features footage of Trump at the Republican National Convention in 2016 saying he would "do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens." Trump had been pledging protection from terrorist attacks weeks after the shootings at the Pulse Nightclub, a gay nightclub in

Orlando, Fla., that was the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history at that time.

The video also highlights "LGBTQ for Trump" T-shirts sold by the former president's campaign and his past comments saying he would be comfortable with Caitlyn Jenner, the former Olympic decathlete who came out as a transgender woman in 2015, using any bathroom at Trump Tower and OK with transgender women competing one day in the Miss Universe pageant, which Trump owned at the time of those remarks.

The video then suddenly veers in a different direction, accompanied by dark, thumping music and images of DeSantis, the Florida governor who is trailing Trump by wide margins in the polls for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination.

It promotes headlines that DeSantis signed "the most extreme slate of anti-trans laws in modern history" and a "draconian anti-trans bathroom bill." The images are spliced together with footage of muscular, shirtless men and several Hollywood actors, including Brad Pitt, seen wearing a leather mask from the movie "Troy."

"To wrap up 'Pride Month,' let's hear from the politician who did more than any other Republican to celebrate it," the DeSantis campaign tweeted.

The video, originally posted by the pro-DeSantis "ProudElephantUS" account, was shared hours after the Supreme Court's conservative majority ruled that a Christian graphic artist who wants to design wedding websites can refuse to work with same-sex couples.

The video drew immediate criticism from prominent LGBTQ+ Republicans, including the Log Cabin Republicans, which bills itself as the nation's "largest Republican organization dedicated to representing LGBT conservatives."

"Today's message from the DeSantis campaign War Room is divisive and desperate. Republicans and other commonsense conservatives know Ron DeSantis has alienated swing-state and younger voters," the group said in a tweet, adding that DeSantis' "extreme rhetoric goes as just ventured into homophobic territory."

The group said his "rhetoric will lose hard-fought gains in critical races across the nation. This old play-book has been tried in the past and has failed — repeatedly." The post said

DeSantis' "naive policy positions are dangerous and politically stupid."

Jenner accused DeSantis' campaign of using "horribly divisive tactics!"

"DeSantis has hit a new low," Jenner wrote on Twitter.

Representatives of the DeSantis campaign did not immediately respond to requests for comment Saturday.

But Christina Pushaw, the campaign's rapid response director, said in a tweet Friday night that "Opposing the federal recognition of 'Pride Month' isn't 'homophobic.' We wouldn't support a month to celebrate straight people for sexual orientation, either ... It's unnecessary, divisive, pandering."

The video comes as Republicans have been Wading into increasingly hostile

anti-LGBTQ+ territory, attacking Pride Month celebrations, trying to ban displays of rainbow Pride flags and passing legislation to limit drag shows, along with broad attacks on transgender rights.

DeSantis leaned in on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation as he prepared to jump into the 2024 White House race. He signed legislation banning classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in all grades, banned gender-affirming care for minors, targeted drag shows, restricted discussion of personal pronouns in schools and forced people to use bathrooms that align with the sex assigned at birth. DeSantis also went after President Joe Biden for prominently displaying the Pride flag at the White House last month.

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DROUGHT

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"It's bad for Hawaii if our rainy season is dry," said Chu, a University of Hawaii meteorology professor. "If our rainy season is dry, then almost the whole year can be dry."

Meanwhile, climatologist Brendan Lane Larson, CEO of AbsoluteClimo LLC, said the team at his Honolulu climate forecasting and risk management firm expects near or slightly above-normal temperatures for the islands during the second half of 2023.

As for precipitation, the firm's forecast is for near-normal rainfall, but the amount could experience a bump depending on what happens with the hurricane season.

"If no tropical depressions or tropical storms impact Hawaii then precipitation for this period will tilt drier, but if one to two depressions or storms impact Hawaii, then precipitation will tilt toward normal or slightly above normal," Lane said in a statement.

NATIONAL WEATHER Service hydrologist Kevin Kodama said El Nino usually features a decent amount of summer rain — but not always. This time, he said, forecasters are calling for below-average precipitation through the end



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The Kuaokala Guarantee fire on Oahu last year started from a campfire and was fueled by parched brush.

of the year and beyond.

What that means is drought is going to become a growing concern. Kodama said severe drought and possibly extreme drought is likely to develop by the end of the dry season, with leeward areas being the most vulnerable, and especially Maui County and Hawaii island.

It could be a bumpy ride

for agricultural concerns and rural areas that rely on rainfall for drinking water.

Impacts, he said, are expected to be the worst for nonirrigated agriculture, water systems dependent on surface water diversions and people who rely on rainfall catchment.

An estimated 30,000 to 60,000 people in the islands are dependent on a

rainwater catchment system for their water needs, according to UH. The majority of those folks are located in the rural Big Island districts of Puna, Kau and Hamakua.

The latest Hawaii Drought Monitor indicates that over 40% of the state is already experiencing some form of drought or abnormally dry conditions, including much of Maui County. The leading edge of the drought stretches across West, Central and Upcountry Maui, which is already wilting under what officials call "moderate drought."

"Upcountry is drying up," said veteran cattleman James Gomes, a consultant to Maui's Ulupalakua Ranch. "I see a lot of dry spots that used to be green."

Gomes, former president of the Hawaii Cattleman's Council, said ranches across the state will be facing the same situation in the coming months, if they're not in it already.

At Ulupalakua, the 18,000-acre Upcountry ranch is under a double threat of drought and a growing wild axis deer population that is gobbling up the grass.

Gomes said the ranch has already downsized its herd by 50% in anticipation of the impending drought.

"When it's dry and in times of drought, you prepare for when you are flush with grass," he said. "When you're flush with grass, you prepare for when it's drought."

To help stay in business, the ranch has had to diversify with tourism components, including a restaurant, retail shop and vineyard.

KEN LOVE, executive director of the 2,000-member Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers, said many fruit farmers may face drought challenges in the months ahead, as only about 50% of farms are outfitted with irrigation.

Love said a lot of fruit growers are looking at crops to help cope with periods of drought and excessive rain. Figs and pomegranates, for example, do well in dry conditions, he said, while durian, meringue and lychee thrive in wet conditions.

Love operates Love Family Farms in Kealahou, which grows some 300 species on 2 acres equipped with 46 irrigation stations. "I don't worry about drought," he said.

Love said he's rather skeptical of the drought forecast because of how wet this year has been so far. "It still rains almost every afternoon."

Kodama said the wet season saw near- to above-average rainfall in most areas, generating the ninth-wettest season in the past 30 years.

All areas of drought in the state were eliminated by mid-February, he said, and above-average rain fell across most regions through April.

Because of the late wet

season rainfall, the greatest wildfire risk is expected to develop later than the normal late-July to early-August time frame, Kodama said.

Darwin Okinaka, assistant fire chief with the Hawaii Fire Department, told reporters last month that he's seen a lot of vegetation growth in the South Kohala area along Highway 190, where the Big Island typically experiences large wildland fires.

"It's green right now but when the weather does dry up, all of that will dry up and it will become fuel," he said.

Most wildfires in Hawaii tend to be smaller in size when compared with fires in other Western states. But research has shown that Hawaii loses as much acreage to fire most years, as a percentage of land area, as all the large Pacific and Western states.

The Big Island has been the location of the largest brush fires in recent years, and both the 40,000-acre Mana Road fire in 2021 and last year's 17,000-acre Leilani fire were fueled by invasive grasses, officials said.

Elizabeth Pickett, co-executive director of the Hawai'i Wildfire Management Organization, said she actually feels a bit anxious when it rains a lot.

"Don't be fooled by what's green out there and all that vegetation that's grown, because that's just more fuel to burn once it dries out," Pickett said.

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