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How Trans Organizers Are Fighting Back Against Ron DeSantis

“Ron DeSantis accidentally created the most powerful resistance that he could ever imagine because we’re angry and we’re connecting and we’re caring for each other.”

By Lil Kalish

Jun 11, 2023, 08:00 AM EDT



AD 00:01 Coming up: Gov. Ron DeSantis Goes After Pride



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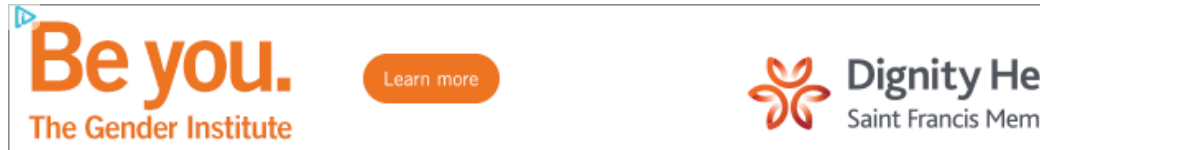
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In mid-May, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed a flurry of bills targeting LGBTQ+ people in all aspects of public life, including banning gender-affirming care for trans youth and adult Medicaid recipients, restricting drag performances, criminalizing trans people for using bathrooms that align with their gender, and barring educators from teaching students about gender and sexuality.

About two weeks after signing these laws — the culmination of the governor’s three-year legislative and administrative attack on transgender people, immigrants and people of color — DeSantis announced his Republican presidential campaign and his desire to model the rest of the country after Florida.

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The advertisement banner features two logos. On the left is 'Be you. The Gender Institute' with a blue play button icon. In the center is an orange rounded rectangle with the text 'Learn more'. On the right is the 'Dignity Health Saint Francis Memorial Hospital' logo, which includes a stylized orange flower icon.

Some trans people who have the means have left the state because of the new laws. But many who have stayed say they're living through a catalyzing moment for organized resistance, and they're fighting back through everyday acts of defiance. HuffPost spoke with six trans organizers across the state who have been fighting back against DeSantis in myriad ways, from community education to art to personal resistance — even while some organizers have had their own access to gender-affirming care threatened.

“I’ve never believed more in the grit of trans people than I do right now,” said Billy Branca, a 29-year-old LGBTQ+ advocate in St. Petersburg. “I think that in trying to erase us, Ron DeSantis accidentally created the most powerful resistance that he could ever imagine because we’re angry and we’re connecting and we’re caring for each other.”

Roadblocks To Health Care

For the last few months, Branca and a group of trans organizers have researched and compiled a list of clinics that are still offering

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Branca said the group wanted to create an inclusive and up-to-date “how-to” for trans youth and adults desperate to find appointments before it is too late. The guide also includes mental health resources, scholarships to cover health care and practical information like which pharmacies are trans-friendly and what are the estimated costs for hormones. More than 130 people have reached out to access the guide since they began distributing it last month. (Branca asked that HuffPost not link to the guide, as another popular online trans resource became the target of a harassment campaign last year after being covered by the media.)

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“We’re democratizing access,” Branca said. “Moving hurdles out of the way and creating a situation where you just have to call and make the appointment instead of collecting a ton of information on your own ... is also a form of resistance because we are working as a community to clear obstacles to keep our loved ones alive.”

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40-year-old trans woman to educate her cisgender neighbors. For the last two weeks, she has set up a booth at a farmers market with a sign that reads, “Ask a trans woman,” inviting people to ask her about what it’s like for trans adults who are losing access to gender-affirming care.

“There’s so much misinformation going around, and if we don’t control the narrative, it’s definitely going to get controlled for us by some insane people,” she said.



Hundreds rally and march at a Pride event in Orlando, Florida, in May. JOHN RAOUX VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

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ended gender-affirming care for trans youth and adult medical recipients, she met with her nurse practitioner, who told her they would no longer be able to prescribe her estrogen. Under the state's new regulations, only doctors of medicine or osteopathic medicine will be able to prescribe hormone therapy. About 80% of trans adults in Florida get care from nurse practitioners. (The law may be found unconstitutional after a federal judge recently issued a [preliminary injunction](#), which for now applies only to three families in the state.)

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“We cried in the hallway because they said they can’t see me again,” Mariposa said. “It was the harshest breakup of two people that didn’t want to break up.”

Even if Mariposa can find a doctor, she won’t currently be able to access the hormone pills. Providers can’t write prescriptions until patients sign a newly required informed-consent form in person — which the medical board still has to create. Mariposa has only two weeks’ worth of hormone medication.

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community's current stress levels. But we're resilience badassess. We're going to come together in big, beautiful ways, and it's already happening."

'A Bright Red Bull's-Eye'

For some, that resilience looks like just continuing to express oneself and be visibly trans in public.

Sage Rosenberg, a transmasculine nonbinary performer who uses the drag name King Femme, said they worry every day about their safety and that a new law attacking a part of their identity will be passed. But they said the joy and strength of their community helps them get up on stage.

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The advertisement banner features two logos. On the left is the logo for "Be you. The Gender Institute", which includes a small blue play button icon to the left of the text "Be you." in a large, bold, orange font, with "The Gender Institute" in a smaller orange font below it. To the right of this logo is an orange rounded rectangular button with the text "Learn more" in white. On the right side of the banner is the logo for "Dignity Health Saint Francis Memorial Hospital", which consists of a stylized orange flower-like icon to the left of the text "Dignity Health" in a bold, dark blue font, with "Saint Francis Memorial Hospital" in a smaller, dark blue font below it.

"It's absolutely terrifying to go to a Pride event now, but it's something where I don't know if there's anything else that could give me so much joy and healing," Rosenberg said. "It's hard to focus on

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until back.

Similarly, Vyn Suazion, a trans man and drag performer who lives in Tarpon Springs, said leaving his house each morning is “a big red flag.” He lives on the border of a county that was once owned by the Ku Klux Klan and said people have thrown eggs at his car, which has an “Equality Florida” bumper sticker.

But Suazion, who is on the board of his local PFLAG chapter, an educational support group for LGBTQ people and their families, said he has also seen signs of positive change in his community.

“I live in a neighborhood where I’m surrounded by right-wing party people. At the same time, they’ve taken the opportunity to learn who I am. I’m grateful to say that I’m protected in my space by people who have different political views than me,” Suazion said. “They agree that what is happening to the LGBTQ community is unconstitutional — and I believe education is what’s changing the game.”

Brandon Wolf, the press secretary of Florida’s largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group, said one of the biggest lessons over the last two terms of DeSantis’ governorship has been about how the erosion of queer and trans civil liberties threatens everyone’s rights and freedoms.

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“I think part of the right-wing strategy is to force people to play whack-a-mole with every issue imaginable,” Wolf said. “Every community imaginable is under constant assault. They’re putting our communities under siege and hope that we get so overwhelmed trying to put out each individual fire that we can’t figure out who set it all ablaze.”

But he said he has been heartened by the acts of community resistance he has seen: record numbers of attendees at Pride events in Sarasota and Tallahassee, student-led walkouts and a number of LGBTQ+ people running for office in the state. He sees the current fight in Florida as crucial for coalition-building across marginalized communities around the country, especially in light of DeSantis’ 2024 presidential campaign.

“What happens in Florida very often drives the conversation around the country,” he said. “If we allow Ron DeSantis to be elected president of the United States, the book bans are coming your way.

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that is his blueprint for what he thinks this country should look like.

But plenty of Floridians are trying to keep that from happening.

Last week, Alex S, a software developer who runs an online trans resource called The Umbrella Guide, drove two hours from his Orlando home to Tampa to attend the Board of Medicine meeting where the group discussed what needs to be included on the consent form to receive hormones. The form likely won't be available until July. Alex, who asked to not be identified by his full name because he is concerned for his safety, said he was surprised by the hundred or so trans people and allies who showed up to make their voices heard at the board meeting.

"I didn't have very much optimism until I started getting involved. It's easy to sit at home and read about all the terrible things that are happening and all the comments that are saying you need to get out of Florida now," the lifelong Floridian said. "Don't give up on Florida... we're still here. I mean, just existing and being yourself right now and not falling into despair is resistance in my eyes."

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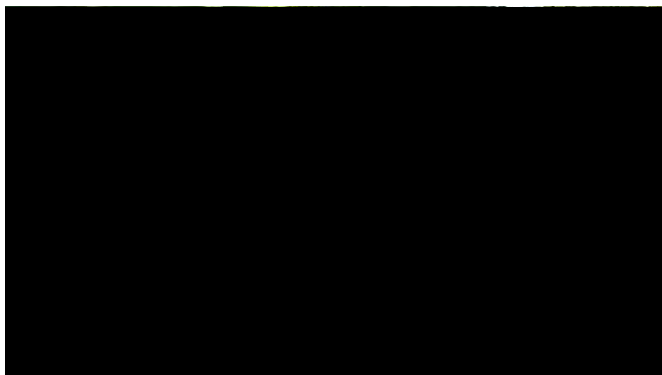
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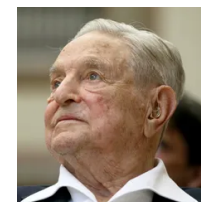
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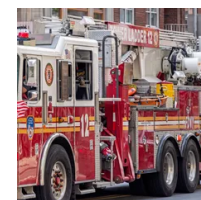
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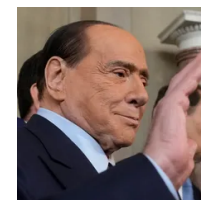
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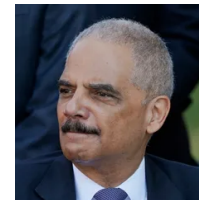
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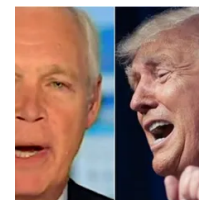
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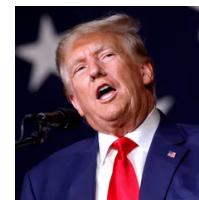
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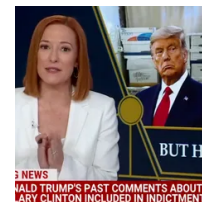
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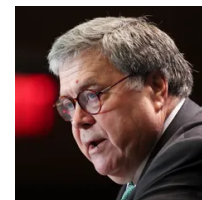
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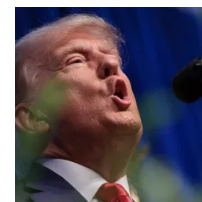
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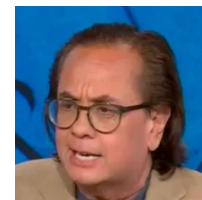
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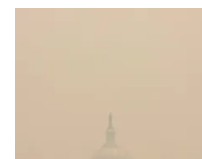
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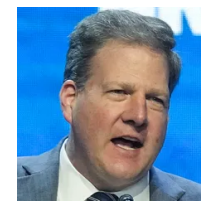


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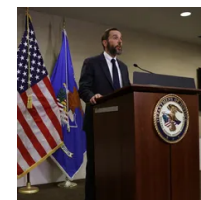
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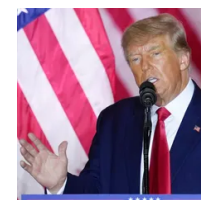
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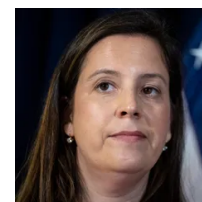


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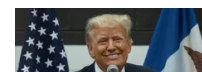
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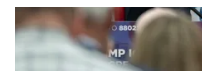
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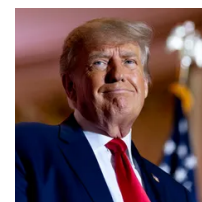


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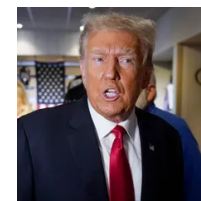
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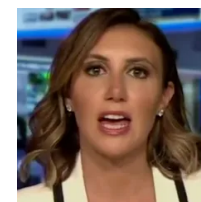
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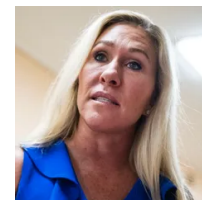
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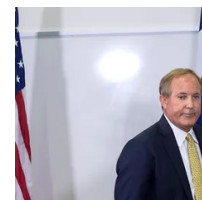
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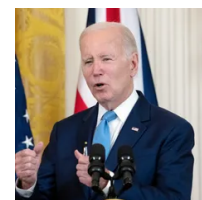
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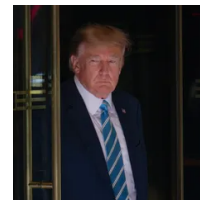


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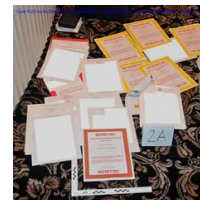
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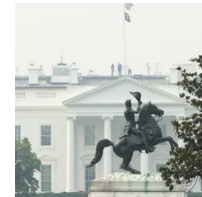


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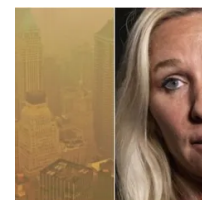
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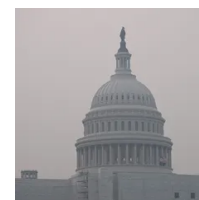
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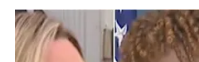
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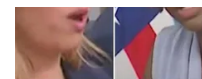
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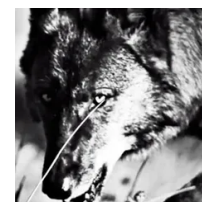
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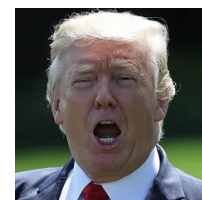
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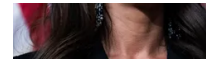
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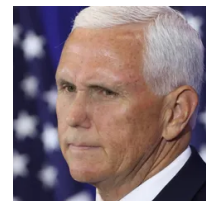
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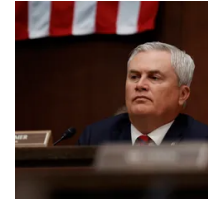
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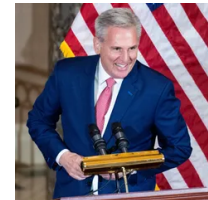
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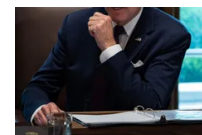
Trump Told He Is Target Of Criminal Investigation Into Classified Documents: Reports



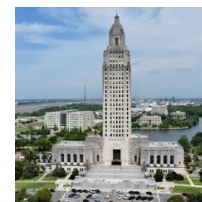


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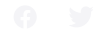
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