

A Titanic Showdown Is Coming

If you think it's hot in Florida now, wait until summer is over – and the campaign for governor really heats up the sunshine state.

In one corner we have Congressman Ron DeSantis, a conservative Republican and a Donald Trump acolyte.

And in the other corner, there's Tallahassee mayor Andrew Gillum, a progressive Democrat backed by the Vermont socialist Bernie Sanders. Gillum wants to abolish ICE, institute Medicare for everyone, raise taxes on corporations, and impeach Donald Trump.

Florida is the nation's largest swing state so the race between a Trump conservative and a Sanders progressive is already being called a "titanic showdown" and a proxy for the 2020 president race.

Florida went for Mr. Trump in 2016, but not by much, only about 1 percentage point. And the last time Florida voters elected a Democratic governor was 20 years ago. Florida isn't Vermont so it's going to be a tough road ahead for Bernie's guy.

But if he did manage to win, he'd be the first African American elected governor in Florida. And if he should lose, rest assured the word that will be thrown around more than any other will be some form of ... racism.

That's more than an idle prediction. We already have reason to believe that race is going to be as big a factor in the campaign as anything else.

By now you've probably heard that DeSantis, who is white, said this on Fox the morning after he won the GOP primary:

"Florida elections are always competitive, and this is a guy

who, although he's much too liberal for Florida, I think he's got huge problems with how he's governed Tallahassee, he is an articulate spokesman for those far-left views, and he's a charismatic candidate. I watched those Democrat debates, and none of that is my cup of tea, but he performed better than those other people there. So we've got to work hard to make sure that we continue Florida going in a good direction, let's build off the success we've had on Governor Scott, the last thing we need to do is to monkey this up by trying to embrace a socialist agenda with huge tax increases and bankrupting the state. That's not going to work."

Yes, he said monkey. A smarter politician would have said, "the last thing we need to do is *mess* this up," or "*muck* this up." Anyone not in a coma had to know that he'd be called a racist for using the M word.

This strikes me as way beyond crazy but such is our political culture.

The Huffington Post wasted no time – in what ostensibly was a straight news story – calling DeSantis a bigot. "Andrew Gillum became the Democratic nominee for Florida governor on Tuesday night," the story began. "On Wednesday morning, his opponent, GOP candidate Ron DeSantis, made racist dog-whistle comments about him."

And social media predictably lit up with comments like this: "12 hrs into the general election cycle, Ron DeSantis has already alluded to Andrew Gillum as a 'monkey.' This is the spirit of racial animus that fuels today's GOP. That Trump and his friends in politics use to energize a white base. It's baseless + un-American."

I'm with Charles Cooke, who had this to say on National Review:

"We hear a lot about the 'politics of division' these days. Indeed, that phrase was used in a few quarters as a criticism

of DeSantis's words. But I can think of fewer more 'divisive' actions than falsely telling millions of people that the man who may well be their next governor believes that African Americans are monkeys. Those who did so should be ashamed."

Gillum, also on Fox, accused DeSantis of "taking a page directly from the campaign manual of Donald Trump" and said he believes Florida voters are "sick" of the division from DeSantis.

And for good measure he threw in that "Well, in the handbook of Donald Trump they no longer do [dog] whistle calls," Gillum said. "They are now using full bullhorns."

So here's my early bet on what the campaign will come down to: DeSantis will tell the voters over and over again that Gillum is a Bernie Sanders socialist. And Gillum will tell the voters just as often that DeSantis is a right-wing Donald Trump racist.

If you don't live in Florida, consider yourself lucky.