



Written by [Annalisa Pesek](#) on October 11, 2022

DeSantis Restores Access to Florida Island in Record Time

Rising star Republican Governor Ron DeSantis wasted no time getting to work to repair the damages in the hardest-hit areas of Florida's southeast coast after Hurricane Ian pummeled communities of Lee and Charlotte counties before spiraling up north and inland, wreaking havoc on the northern parts of the Sunshine State.

On October 5, America's "freedom" governor announced on Twitter that "construction on the Pine Island bridge has been completed today — just three days after construction began. Happy to have the state step in and help get our Pine Island residents back on their feet."



AP Images
Ron DeSantis

Today, First Lady Casey DeSantis [announced](#) that a whopping \$41 million has been raised through the [Florida Disaster Fund](#), a private state fund established to assist Floridians in times of emergency and disaster. One hundred percent of every donation will be used to help the state recover from the devastation caused by Ian.

"I'll just say of that \$41 million dollars that we've raised so far, the first million out the door went to organizations like [ToolBank](#) and [Team Rubicon](#) who were on the ground helping folks," remarked Mrs. DeSantis.

"We also understand that this is going to be a long-term recovery effort for a lot of folks. And while FEMA is there, the state is there, we want to ensure that those funds are there to help people get back on their feet because we've seen so many people who have had flooding at their homes that might not have necessarily had flood insurance."

The governor and first lady [spoke from a disaster relief center \(DRC\)](#) in Charlotte County that received monies from the Florida Disaster Fund. DeSantis noted that through the activation of the Florida Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan program, with \$50 million available for businesses impacted by Ian, [\\$2.5 million in loans have been awarded to 55 businesses](#). He also said that all but three schools in Charlotte County will be open by Monday, October 17.

That's a great bounce back. It's going to be really, really significant, said DeSantis. It's obviously important for the academic progression. We saw that during COVID when they were locking kids out of school in other parts of the country, and they did that for over a year, and that's created over years of learning loss.

I'm happy to say in Florida we made it a priority to have our kids in school and we're much better off for that.



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The Biden administration has also committed [federal assistance](#) to Florida, supplying search and rescue operations, in addition to shelter and food. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) has reported sending tens of millions of dollars in assistance, providing families with money to replace essential items, support temporary rentals, and begin home repairs.

Reconnecting Floridians Back to Their Homes

Devastation from the Category 4 storm swept across southeast Florida, especially the Fort Myers area, where Ian made landfall during the afternoon of September 29. Dozens of lives were lost and thousands were changed forever. Yet amidst the tragedy and the ongoing chaos, state leadership has proven to be calm, steady, and in control.

“Within 24 hours after [the storm] I asked FDOT [Florida Department of Transportation] to get involved, we had more than 130 trucks rolling in and crews got to work,” said Governor DeSantis in a [press release](#).

On October 3, DeSantis enlisted the FDOT to start emergency road and bridge repairs for one of the barrier islands, Pine Island, after a road and bridge connecting the island to the mainland were severely damaged and unpassable.

“We made it a priority and we didn’t just get it done — we got it done quick. I want to thank the dedicated FDOT crews for working around the clock to restore the community’s access to Pine Island,” he said at a [press conference](#).

“The 9,000 residents of Pine Island — some still on the island and those not — are without power, water, and other critical resources needed to recover from Hurricane Ian. FDOT has the workforce and resources needed to quickly restore this road and bridge and allow these families access to their homes so they can start rebuilding their lives.”

Rebuilding Access Marks the Road to Recovery

A temporary bridge to Pine Island, located west of Cape Coral, will serve as a safe short-term option for residents to get on and off the island. The work was expected to be completed by Saturday, October 8, but DeSantis praised FDOT crews who “worked hard to finish the repairs in monumental timing — less than three days.”

According to news teams reporting from the islands, as well as Lee County’s Department of Public Safety, the barrier islands in Lee County, including the Sanibel and Pine Islands, were absolutely annihilated by Ian, with major flooding and destruction to roads and bridges making the communities of 7,000 and 9,000, respectively, [“unrecognizable.”](#)

Sanibel Mayor Holly Smith told [ABC News](#) in the wake of Ian, “It’s a different Sanibel. This is going to be a very long recovery process.”

Indeed, Ian caused the most damage to the beach towns, with county officials saying it was the worst they had ever seen. But inland areas were not spared Ian’s wrath. The pictures below show the catastrophic conditions of towns 30 miles away from the areas directly hit two weeks after Ian made landfall. This RV park, partially under water, is located just outside Arcadia, north of Fort Myers in DeSoto County. Toppled motor homes appear to have been picked up and tossed into the air.



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On October 8, residents of the small town [El Jobean](#) in Port Charlotte in Charlotte County were still reporting no water and no electricity, as were parts of Cape Coral and North Fort Myers. However, through significant recovery efforts, 99 percent of people in Southwest Florida are with power, noted DeSantis at a [press conference](#) on Saturday.

DeSantis's goals for this month include repairing the [severely damaged Sanibel Island causeway](#), which partially sunk in the wake of Ian's wrath and is now among the mix of sand and muck covering so much of the once-sandy beach town.

In the two weeks since Ian slammed the Sunshine State, massive restoration efforts have taken place in Southwest Florida. DeSantis [reported](#) 13,000,000 meals, 2,500,000 pounds of ice, and 2,200,000 gallons of fuel were supplied to Southwest Florida, with 375 Star Link devices provided from Elon Musk, and 2,507 bridges restored. Further, mayors from neighboring cities, including [Greg Brudnicki](#) of Panama City, have traveled to Fort Myers to assess the wreckage and offer ideas of how to move forward.



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DeSantis, unrelenting in his quest to offer Floridians the help they need to recover, has ignored criticism from his foes and continued to fight the political battle that rages around him. He remains unafraid to speak truth and to inspire others to do the same. Don't mess with Florida. "It's a law-and-order state," he remarked. And whether conservative or liberal, the vast majority of Floridians with whom *The New American* spoke in the past weeks, who were impacted by the storm, are grateful for his strong and heroic leadership.



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