



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 13, 2021

Noem Throws Stones at DeSantis, Forgetting Her Own Glass House

At the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Dallas, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem took a thinly veiled swipe at her fellow Republican executive, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, for having temporarily imposed coronavirus restrictions on his state only to become a leading opponent of them later on.

“Let’s talk about rewriting history,” Noem [said](#) Sunday. “We’ve got Republican governors across this country pretending they didn’t shut down their states, that they didn’t close their beaches, that they didn’t mandate masks, that they didn’t need to issue shelter-in-places.... We need leaders with grit, that their first instinct is to make the right decision, that they don’t backtrack and then try to fool you into the fact that they never made the wrong decision.”



AP Images
Kristi Noem

Although Noem’s spokesman told the [Daily Caller](#) she “was not referring to any specific Republican governor,” few are buying that. Thanks to the public’s perception that they didn’t destroy their states in response to a virus, Noem and DeSantis are among the most popular GOP governors in the country, and both are rumored to be considering runs for the White House. It’s only natural that Noem would want to contrast herself with DeSantis by highlighting the supposed fact that she never heeded the siren song of lockdowns and mask mandates.

Indeed, at February’s CPAC in Orlando, Florida, Noem flatly [declared](#), “South Dakota is the only state in America that never ordered a single business or church to close. We never instituted a shelter-in-place order. We never mandated that people wear masks. We never even defined what an essential business is because I don’t believe governors have the authority to tell you your business isn’t essential.”

However, as Substack author [Jon Schweppe](#) points out, for Noem to claim she never imposed COVID-19 restrictions and to dump on other Republican governors who did impose them only to realize the error of their ways “is just patently ridiculous.” Noem, in fact, sought broad emergency powers to shutter all kinds of public and private institutions and later issued executive orders that imposed many of the restrictions she now says she “never” mandated.

Schweppe writes: “On March 30, 2020, at the request of Gov. Noem, South Dakota Rep. Lee Qualm introduced House Bill 1297, a bill that would declare a state of emergency in South Dakota and give the Secretary of Health unprecedented powers to impose mandates and lockdowns, allowing for the placement of ‘reasonable restrictions’ on any public or private location, including a ‘business, park, school, or other location that promotes public gathering.’”



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Does that sound like a leader whose “first instinct is to make the right decision”?

After the legislature overwhelmingly rejected Noem’s power grab, the governor issued [two executive orders](#). Among other things, these orders mandated that:

- All employers implement Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, which at the time included such things as hand washing and social distancing (mask wearing would come later);
- Businesses “suspend or modify business practices” involving 10 or more people in an enclosed space where social distancing could not occur;
- “Non-essential elective surgeries” be postponed; and
- Local governments “restrict public gatherings of ten people or more, unless it is necessary,” and ensure that businesses are complying with all of Noem’s orders.

In addition, in certain counties, “vulnerable individuals,” defined as those over age 65 or those with “serious underlying medical conditions,” were ordered stay home except “to work in a critical infrastructure sector job or to conduct essential errands.” They were also told to take other precautions, including avoiding “non-essential travel.”

Although Noem rescinded these orders within a month — about the same length of time it took DeSantis to do likewise — “ultimately, Gov. Noem did shut down her state for a time,” observes Schweppe. “She did ban gatherings over ten people. She did effectively mandate masks by requiring businesses and local governments to adhere to CDC guidance. She did issue a shelter-in-place order. She did shut down schools. She did urge South Dakotans to download an app that tracked their movements and handed that data off to third parties. Perhaps these were all justified measures, but she should own them. Otherwise, it might look like she’s one of those Republican governors ‘pretending.’”



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