
DeSantis and Biden speak on storm recovery after reports GOP governor hadn't returned calls from president, vice president

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Harris responds to report that DeSantis refused her calls about storm recovery

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(CNN) — The White House said that Ron DeSantis and Joe Biden spoke Monday night following reports that the Republican governor of Florida had refused calls from the president and Vice President Kamala Harris as officials continue hurricane recovery efforts and prepare for another to make landfall later this week.

Senior assistant White House press secretary Emilie Simons said Monday in a post on X that “Tonight, @POTUS spoke with @GovRonDeSantis and Tampa Mayor Jane Castor to get a report on recovery efforts for Hurricane Helene and preparations for Hurricane Milton,” which is forecast to make landfall in Florida on Wednesday.

“He asked both to call him directly if anything can be done to further support response and recovery efforts,” Simons added.

Harris, a White House official told CNN, had reached out to DeSantis multiple times in the time since Hurricane Helene made landfall in his state, but the governor had not taken the vice president’s calls. When Biden visited Florida last week to survey storm damage on the ground, DeSantis declined to join him, instead holding a press conference with reporters four hours south of the area the president toured.

“We invited the governor, right, to come and survey the damage areas with the president – obviously, we were in Florida, we invited the governor of Florida to come, it was his decision not, to not attend or not be there with the president,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters earlier Monday. “The president has reached out around Hurricane Helene. He reached out. It is up to the governor, it is really up to the governor.”

DeSantis told reporters Monday that he had not been aware of the vice president’s reach outs, claiming at a press briefing in Tallahassee, “I didn’t know she called me.”

The governor said he was thankful to Biden for approving everything they needed thus far, adding that if they need additional help, he “will not hesitate” to give him a call.

“We want to use whatever resources are available to be able to help Floridians prepare and respond to this storm. But everything we’ve asked for from President Biden, he has approved, and we do think we’ll get more approvals for some of the individual assistance and the debris

removal after landfall,” DeSantis said.

Harris also responded to reports of DeSantis not taking her calls Monday, saying that “moments of crisis, if nothing else, should really be the moment that anyone who calls themselves a leader says they’re going to put politics aside and put the people first.”

“People are in desperate need of support right now, and playing political games at this moment, in these crisis situations – these are the height of emergency situations – is just utterly irresponsible, and it is selfish, and it is about political gamesmanship instead of doing the job that you took an oath to do, which is putting the people first,” the vice president told reporters on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews.

DeSantis told Fox News later Monday that Harris “has no role in this process. I’m in contact with the president of the United States. I’m in contact with FEMA director. I’m obviously managing all our state agencies. We’re supporting all our local government.”



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The governor added: “She is being selfish by trying to blunder into this when we’re working just fine.”

CNN has reached out to the White House, the Harris campaign and DeSantis’ office on details surrounding outreach between Biden, Harris, and DeSantis.

NBC News first reported on DeSantis having not taken Harris’ calls.

It’s not the first time the Florida governor has eschewed a meeting with Biden following a natural disaster. In 2023, he declined to meet with Biden on a trip to the state following Hurricane Idalia, even after the president said he’d planned to meet with the Republican governor.

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell connected Sunday with DeSantis to discuss preparations for Hurricane Milton.

“She spoke with him yesterday in regards to Milton,” Jean-Pierre said earlier Monday. “And we’re going to continue to certainly pre-position on the ground, and we’re going to support the communities with whatever they need and whenever. That is our commitment.”

Harris on Monday urged people in the path of Hurricane Milton to heed the warnings of state and local officials after she had also just spoken with Criswell.

"I cannot stress enough to all the folks in Florida, in the Tampa area, please listen to evacuation orders," she said. "Please listen to your local officials, because I know a lot of folks out there have survived these hurricanes before – this one is going to be very, very serious, and I urge you to please just grab whatever you need, listen to the orders you're getting from your local officials."

Jean-Pierre insisted that the federal government remains focused on disaster recovery in the state regardless of whether DeSantis returns calls from the president or vice president.

Federal officials, the press secretary said, will provide a "robust all-of-government" response.

This headline and story have been updated with additional details.

CNN's Kit Maher contributed to this report.

Correction: This story has been updated to accurately reflect where DeSantis held his press conference in relation to Biden last week.

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