

PRIMARY PRIMER



Florida Congressman Byron Donalds of Naples holds a town hall on Jan. 24 at Grace Emmanuel Church in Port St. Lucie. Donalds leads the field in polling ahead of the Aug. 18 Republican primary election. KAILA JONES /TCPALM



Democratic candidate for Florida governor David Jolly speaks with the Tallahassee Democrat on his stances on various topics after holding a rally outside the Capitol on June 10. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Trump endorsement steers GOP primary for governor toward Donalds

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Four prominent Florida Republicans are vying for their party’s nomination for governor, but only one – Byron Donalds – has the endorsement of President Trump.

That’s made all the difference.

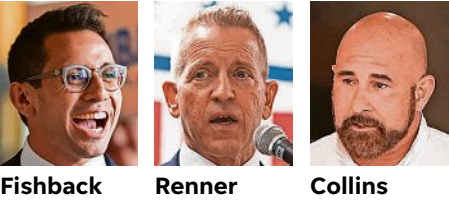
Polls show that GOP voters in the Aug. 18 primary look certain to make the three-term Naples congressman their choice heading into the November contest against likely Democratic nominee David Jolly.

Term-limited Gov. Ron DeSantis hasn’t endorsed. But with Donalds wrapped in Trump’s embrace, the primary hasn’t been much of a contest.

And yet it includes plenty of sniping.

The clash among candidates

Among those trailing Donalds, Lt. Gov. Jay Collins recently tried unsuccessfully to oust conservative activist James Fishback from the ballot. That was over claims he failed to meet the state’s seven-year residency requirement.



Fishback wants Collins to resign, after his challenge was rejected by a court.

Former House Speaker Paul Renner of Palm Coast has been targeting Donalds, raising red flags about the frontrunner’s taking in more than \$5 million in campaign contributions from data center interests.

Renner, 59, has called for a moratorium on data centers – while Donalds has tried to soften his once go-go stance on artificial intelligence, amid rising voter opposition.

“In my Florida, if you don’t protect our pocketbooks and our people, you won’t build data centers. Period,” Donalds said in TV ads.

Fishback, 31, also has inserted racial rhetoric into his attacks on Donalds,

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Jolly and Graham aim to end Florida GOP dominance. Can they?

James Call
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

David Jolly stood before an Orlando ballroom of Florida Democrats recently and delivered a message that would have sounded far-fetched a couple of years ago.

“I’m telling you, folks, if the election were tonight, we would win this race,” the former Republican congressman told hundreds of Democrats from across Florida who had gathered at the Democrats’ annual Leadership Blue conference on July 18.

Jolly casts the GOP frontrunner – President Donald Trump-endorsed U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Naples – as the candidate of a Tallahassee establishment that has dominated Florida government for three decades. No Democrat has won Florida’s governorship since Lawton Chiles in 1994.

Since then, Republicans have won eight consecutive gubernatorial elections, claimed every statewide elected office, built supermajorities in the Florida Legislature and amassed what is now a voter-registration advantage of 1.5 million voters.

The GOP has transformed a state

where the 2000 presidential election was decided by fewer than 600 votes into a Republican stronghold that President Donald Trump has won three times, the last in 2024 by a 13-point (or 1.4 million-vote) margin.

Now, as Democratic voters prepare to choose their nominee Aug. 18, the party’s hopes rest largely with Jolly, a former GOP congressman, MSNBC commentator and longtime Trump critic. The only other Democrat of note to qualify is state Rep. Dotie Joseph, a North Miami Democrat, who launched a long-shot campaign in June.

Jolly is betting frustrations with inflation, rising food costs and expensive insurance will help Democrats break Republicans’ three-decade hold on the Governor’s Mansion. He’s telling voters a Democratic gubernatorial victory is possible.

In other words, he wants them to believe.

A coalition of the financially squeezed middle

Since entering the race in June 2025,

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Tallahassee mayoral race draws bets ahead of Election Day

Elena Barrera
Tallahassee Democrat
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

The primary election is just days away, and for the first time, the Tallahassee mayoral race has hit the prediction markets.

Official wagers are being made on which candidate will become Tallahassee’s next mayor through major prediction market sites Polymarket and Kalshi. So far, more than \$120,000 in trades have been made on Polymarket and almost \$10,000 on Kalshi.

Three well-known candidates – former state lawmaker Loranne Ausley, City Commissioner Jeremy Matlow and attorney Daryl Parks – and one political newcomer, Michael Foust, are all vying for the mayoral seat, and so far,

Online at Tallahassee.com

Vote with confidence by visiting our Ultimate Election Guide to all the races, candidates and issues on the ballot. Watch the mayoral and other local candidates debate on our YouTube page.

the prediction sites both have Ausley as the frontrunner.

Lonna Atkeson, an election science expert and professor at Florida State University, said these betting sites are fun but she doesn’t think they really influence elections at all.

Prediction markets are online platforms that allow people to buy and trade “contracts” based on the predicted outcome of a future event, from sports games to the outcome of a war,



Kalshi is one of the leading prediction market platforms in the U.S. It has also been the subject of several lawsuits.

rather than placing bets through a sportsbook or casino, USA TODAY has reported.

People who aren’t invested in politics may not be aware of these sites, At-



Polymarket is one of the leading prediction market platforms in the U.S.

PHOTOS BY DADO RUVIC/REUTERS

keson said, and those who are, aren’t relying on betting odds to help them decide how to cast their vote.

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