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"I don't think people should protest this, no," he said.

Vin Weber, a GOP strategist and former member of the House Republican leadership, said Republican lawmakers "should condemn the precedent of arresting and indicting a former president. Period, full stop."

"If we let the genie out of the bottle, we can expect that it'll happen again to other people and all of the sudden America doesn't look like America anymore. We look like those countries where you would use the judicial system to go after your political opponents," he said.

Trump's biggest rival for the GOP presidential nomination, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), at first stayed quiet about the former president's possible indictment.

He finally broke his silence on Monday by offering a half-hearted defense.

"I've seen rumors swirl. I have not seen any facts yet, and so I don't know what's going to happen," he said. "But I do know this: The Manhattan district attorney is a Soros-funded prosecutor and so he, like other Soros-funded prosecutors, they weaponize their office to impose a political agenda on society at the expense of the rule of law and public safety."

George Soros is a prominent Demo-

cratic donor who has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to Color of Change PAC, which supported Bragg's election. He's also a frequent target of the GOP and conspiracy theories.

DeSantis also took a veiled shot at his rival by quipping he didn't "know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some type of alleged affair."

In a sign of how statements about Trump are already playing out in real time in the emerging GOP presidential primary race, Donald Trump Jr. blasted DeSantis's response as "pure weakness."

"So DeSantis thinks that Dems weaponizing the law to indict President Trump is a 'manufactured circus' & isn't a 'real issue' Pure weakness. Now we know why he was silent all weekend. He's totally owned by Karl Rove, Paul Ryan & his billionaire donors. 100% Controlled Opposition," he tweeted.

A Senate Republican aide said GOP senators who aren't Trump fans will straddle the line like DeSantis by condemning the Manhattan district attorney for dredging up an old allegation while staying away from defending Trump.

"DeSantis's statement was pretty creative, it checked both boxes, acknowledging the absurdity of paying off a porn star and all that and highlighting how this is a Soros-backed district attorney. That may be the way forward for people,"

The top members of Senate Republican leadership have stayed silent on the prospect of Trump being arrested and on Trump's calls for mass protests.

Trump's biggest rival for the GOP presidential nomination, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, at first stayed quiet about the possible indictment, but finally offered a half-hearted defense of the former president on Monday.

the aide said.

Weber, the GOP strategist, said Trump's alleged conduct "has to appall" leading Republicans such as DeSantis and Utah Sen. Mitt Romney (R) but that's why they should focus on "the precedent of indicting a former president on the face of it is a bad idea."

Brian Darling, a GOP strategist and former Senate aide, acknowledged that prominent Republicans don't want to go too far in defending Trump.

"You're seeing that now with Ron DeSantis's comments, a backhanded defense. You'll see a lot of back-handed defenses going forward. I think that DeSantis probably gave cover to a lot of Republicans to give backhanded defenses," he said.

"But the bottom line is I think that Republicans understand that voters are going to look at this as overreach and the weaponization of the D.A.'s office," he added.



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