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Supporters of Gov. Ron DeSantis have him sign copies of his autobiography "The Courage to Be Free: Florida's Blueprint for America's Revival" at Books-A-Million. PHOTOS BY ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Fans get 8 seconds with Gov. DeSantis

Crowds line up at Tallahassee store for hometown leg of what is likely a pre-presidential bid book tour

James Call

Tallahassee Democrat | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Gov. Ron DeSantis spent little more than a half-hour with fans at a Tallahassee book signing Thursday, with many afterwards saying they urged him to run for president.

DeSantis media handlers distributed 250 tickets to the event, held at a bookstore in a shopping plaza that separates neighborhoods that voted for President Joe Biden from those that voted for former President Donald Trump in 2020.

The event was closed to reporters who stood outside and talked to people as they arrived and left the event.

While the Florida Legislature is at work on DeSantis initiatives to prohibit the teaching of sex and gender in public schools, eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs at universities, and expand access to private and charter schools, DeSantis is doing a series of book signings nationwide for his autobiography, "The Courage to Be Free: Florida's Blueprint for America's Revival."

Political observers call it a political tome for 2024 voters.

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Seen through a window, DeSantis signs copies of his biography at Books-A-Million on Thursday.

Expansion of 'Don't Say Gay' law condemned

Kathryn Varn and Douglas Soule

Tallahassee Democrat

USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

As the parental rights law – now known around the country as "Don't Say Gay" – moved through the Florida Legislature last year, supporters insisted it was about protecting young children, in grades K-3, from lessons that some parents deem inappropriate for that age group.

As he signed the bill into law, DeSantis slammed schools for teaching "kindergartners and first graders and second graders" about sexual orientation and gender identity. Attorney General Ashley Moody called the law a "modest limitation" in court filings defending it.

"The bill is designed to keep school districts from talking about these topics before kids are ready to process them," said ex-Rep. Joe Harding, who sponsored the legislation, formally called the Parental Rights in Education law. Harding resigned from the Legislature in December amid a federal fraud investigation and pleaded guilty to those charges Tuesday.

"They are telling the bullies who tell me every day that I shouldn't exist that they're right ... and they're the highest power in the state."

Will Larkins

Senior at Winter Park High School

Now, as many critics feared from the start, DeSantis and his allies in the Florida Department of Education have moved the goal posts. A rule proposed by the state Board of Education would prohibit classroom instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation in grades 4-12 – unless such instruction is required by state education standards or for the teaching of reproductive health classes "for which a

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Will Larkins speaks during a student-led walkout last year at Winter Park High protesting the so-called "Don't Say Gay" law. MACEY WOODBURN/SPECIAL TO USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

New Florida law spawns tidal wave of lawsuits

John Kennedy

Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Tens of thousands of lawsuits – an almost 700% increase – flooded the offices of court clerks across Florida days before Gov. Ron DeSantis signed sweeping new business-backed legal restrictions which help shield insurance companies, property owners and others accused of wrongdoing.

The law went into effect with DeSantis' signature on Friday. But the lawsuit logjam will take months for clerks and later judges to sort out, officials say.

Critics said that there's no shortage of irony in that

the push by the state's biggest business associations to limit lawsuits first spawned a tidal wave of litigation.

The crush was prompted by attorneys seeking to have cases heard under less-restrictive laws that were in place before Friday. The host of legal changes would apply only to lawsuits filed after that day.

"There are many cases that would've been turned down or would've been settled pre-suit. But given the deadline, you have to file a suit to protect your client," said Todd Michaels, a Coral Gables lawyer and secretary of the Florida Justice Association.

"They brought this upon themselves," Michaels

said of insurance companies, seen as a key driver of the legislation. "They were just in such a rush to take people's rights away so completely and as soon as possible."

But the Senate sponsor of what many call the biggest civil justice overhaul in Florida history, said the cascade of lawsuits merely shows that the changes are needed.

"I think it proves to us that the system is kind of broken and we need to reform it," said Sen. Travis Hutson, R-St. Augustine. "You're seeing all these lawsuits

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