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Before Congressional Run, 'Freedom Doctor' Rudman Files Bill to Repeal Contentious Beach Law

LIV CAPUTO | DECEMBER 10, 2024

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A state Lawmaker planning a congressional bid in Northwest Florida has filed a bill to repeal a controversial state statute that drew a line in the sand on who can use which areas of Florida beaches.

"Freedom Doctor" Rep. Joel Rudman, a Republican family practice physician from Navarre who hopes to succeed Matt Gaetz in Congressional District 1, filed the beach bill Tuesday morning as his second of eight planned bills before he resigns on Jan. 1 and hands the bills off to another sponsor, he told *The Floridian.*

"The legislature passed a bill in 2018 that have the residents of Walton County fighting over who owns the grains of sand. It's pretty pathetic," Rudman said via phone call, blaming 2018's **HB 631** for causing a slew of litigation over which beach areas are public property and which belong to private citizens.

He pointed out that the law only applies to counties that did not have a public beach ordinance in place before Jan. 1, 2016. The only county that fits the bill? Walton, a small yet heavily conservative county in the Florida panhandle. The law prevented new customary use laws—meaning the whole beach is not publicly accessible—and divvied up which areas belonged to private beachfront owners and which could be used by the public.

According to **WMBB**, 39 beach property owners settled in a lawsuit with county commissioners in March, meaning the public can have limited use of a 20-foot transitory zone while the over 1,100 other private properties can remain completely private.

"You literally have beachfront owners fighting with people who live one block off of the beach in terms of who's allowed on the sand, and it's all because the state government got involved," Rudman said. "My house bill is simply going to repeal the statute that got the state involved in the first place.

"It puts the onus for the resolution back on Walton County where it belongs," he added.

Rudman plans to resign his HD 3 seat on Jan. 1 in compliance with Florida's resign-to-run statute ("It's a horrible statute, by the way, and should probably be repealed," said Rudman) to pursue the newly vacant CD-1 seat, emptied by Gaetz when he thought he would be the next Attorney General. After his alleged scandals and testy relationships with conservative Senators got in the way, however, he proved unconfirmable and withdrew his name from consideration.

But that still left CD-1 empty.

So Gov. **Ron DeSantis** declared that a special primary election would be held on Jan. 28 and a general on Apr. 1. Rudman is one of **ten** Republicans who qualified to run, though his biggest challenge will come in the form of CFO Jimmy Patronis, a former state legislator urged and endorsed to run by President-elect Donald **Trump**.

Considering Patronis has the **Trump** seal of approval, is Rudman worried?

"President **Trump** is a huge Rudman supporter—he just doesn't know it yet," Rudman chuckled.

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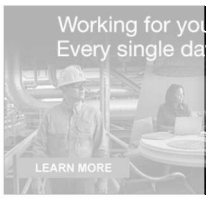


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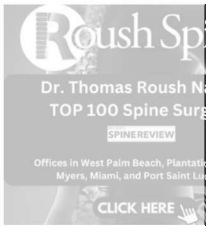
Livia Caputo is a senior at Florida State University, working on a major in Criminology, and a triple minor in Psychology, Communications, and German. She has been working on a journalism career for the past year, and hopes to become a successful reporter after graduation. Her work has been cited in Fox News, the New York Post, and the Daily Mail

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