



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 21, 2022

## Disney vs. Florida: Disney Poised to Lose “Special Privileges” Allowing Autonomy

In the ongoing battle between Disney and the State of Florida over the right of parents to protect their children from being sexualized in the classroom, Florida State Representative Randy Fine just launched a major salvo. The Republican legislator’s bill to remove special privileges allowing the Walt Disney Company to rule itself semi-autonomously in the State of Florida has passed and only awaits the signature of Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, which is near certain.



Spmartin15/Wikimedia Commons

Singed into law in 1967 in response to lobbying efforts by Disney, the Reedy Creek Improvement Act essentially allows Disney self-rule. As Fox Business [reported](#):

The entertainment giant proposed building a recreation-oriented development on 25,000 acres of property in a remote area of Central Florida’s Orange and Osceola counties, which consisted of 38.5 square miles of largely uninhabited pasture and swamp land.

Orange and Osceola County did not have the services or resources needed to bring the project to life, so the state legislature worked with Disney to establish the Reedy Creek Improvement District, a special taxing district that allows the company to act with the same authority and responsibility as a county government.

The district covers Disney’s four Florida theme parks, two water parks and one sports complex, 175 lane miles of roadway, 67 miles of waterway, the cities of Bay Lake and Lake Buena Vista, an environmental science laboratory, an electric power-generating and distribution facility, a natural gas distribution system, water and wastewater collection and treatment facilities, a solid waste and recyclables collection & transfer system and over 40,000 hotel rooms and hundreds of restaurants and retail stores.

As a result of the 1967 law, the Reedy Creek Improvement District (RCID) — which is nearly-synonymous with Disney — “has the ability to levy taxes, write building codes, develop and maintain its own infrastructure and build whatever it wants, including an airport or nuclear power plant,” according to Fox Business.

And besides the logistical autonomy, the arrangement has been extremely lucrative for Disney. As Fox Business reports:

The RCID receives income from taxes and fees imposed within its boundaries. For 2022, the RCID has an operating budget of more than \$169 million, with roughly \$164 million of that



total coming from ad valorem taxes.

For 55 years, Disney has operated in Florida as an independent entity, making its own rules and raking in piles of money in the form of taxes. One might expect Disney to appreciate the comfortable and generous arrangement and keep a low profile where its relationship with the state of Florida is concerned. But of late, Disney — like many other “woke” companies — has attempted to use its stature to bully Florida in the political sphere.

As a result of legislation to protect children in kindergarten through third grade from being receiving classroom instruction on aberrant sexual practices, Disney has flexed its muscles as a major employer in the state by calling for a repeal of the common-sense law. As this writer previously [reported](#):

Of all the Leftist Hollywood types who have been guilty of “sloganeering and fake narratives,” Disney — which has a strong business base in Florida — may take the prize. On Tuesday, DeSantis took Disney out behind the woodshed, saying that Disney and “California corporate executives” have “crossed the line” by coming out with dishonest tactics against the bill.

DeSantis was responding mostly to a tweet by Disney calling for the Florida legislature to repeal the law or for the courts to strike it down. In the tweet, Disney again dishonestly referred to the bill as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill.

And that was a bridge too far for Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis and the Republican-controlled state legislature. Having brought itself to the attention of those who have the power to reign it in, Disney is preparing to pay dearly. On Thursday, Republican State Representative Randy Fine tweeted, “Disney is a guest in Florida. Today, we remind them.” He added that DeSantis had “expanded the Special Session” to allow Fine to “file HB3C which eliminates Reedy Creek Improvement District, a 50 yr-old special statute that makes Disney to exempt from laws faced by regular Floridians.”

That bill — filed Tuesday as part of the “Special Session” allowed by DeSantis — “passed the state Senate Wednesday with a vote of 23-16 and sailed through the state’s House of Representatives by a vote count of 70-38,” according to a [lamenting report by liberal media outlet CNBC](#).

Pointing out the obvious to Disney, Fine tweeted an interview he did with CNN, stating “If you want special privileges, you’d better be on your best behavior.”

And that really is the crux of the matter. The Reedy Creek Improvement Act may have been in the best interests of Florida in 1967; it brought a huge development and revenue-generating enterprise into the state. But that was then, this is now. Even if Disney were still Walt Disney’s Disney, it would be hard to justify such extreme “special privileges” 55 years later. And while — either through favor or oversight — the arrangement has been allowed to stand for 50 years too long (give or take), Disney made it a point to forget the lesson Fine points out to the company. And while that lesson may come too late for Disney, it comes just in time for Florida.

And while the removal of special privileges from Disney may seem to some to be a form of retaliation,



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the reality is that — like a child who has been allowed to stay out later than any of his siblings because his otherwise good behavior has camouflaged his tardiness — Disney’s behavior has caused a closer look. As Fine stated, “Disney kicked the hornet’s nest [and] we looked at special districts,” adding, “People wanted to deal with the special district for decades,” but “Disney had the political power to prevent it for decades. What changed is bringing California values to Florida. Floridians said, ‘You are a guest. Maybe you don’t deserve the special privileges anymore.’”

So — back to this writer’s analogy of the curfew — Mom kept telling dad that Billy routinely stays out late, but Dad responds, “Yeah, but he keeps up on his chores and his grades are great.” But Mom points to the overflowing trash and hands Dad Billy’s most recent report card, evidencing his poor grades. And — voilà — Dad suddenly decides that — come Hell or high water — Billy will be home every night at the same time as his brothers and sisters.

Interestingly, Disney’s competition, Universal, SeaWorld, and Legoland, do not have special districts in which they operate, as Fine pointed out.

Democrats — who seem to want to support Disney’s “woke” agenda or to simply oppose anything introduced by a Republican — pushed back. And while their minority in both houses made their opposition a moot point, they nevertheless fired back in the media. As CNBC reported:

Democrats in the state Senate, though outnumbered, came to the theme park’s defense on Wednesday during a special session of the body.

“The Disney corporation is being attacked for expressing support for its many LGBTQ employees and customers,” said state Sen. Tina Polsky, a Democrat who represents the 19th district of Florida, during the special session. “Are we really making this enormous decision based on spite?”

And:

“I just don’t understand what we are doing here,” said Loranne Ausley, a Democrat who represents the state’s 3rd Senate district, during Wednesday’s session. “We are adding insult to injury by voting on something today that was proposed yesterday going after a private business that has literally made our state what it is, all because they have taken a position that the governor disagrees with.”

While Ausley may think that Disney — all by itself — has “made [Florida] what it is,” millions of Floridians who recognize the grand scope of the Sunshine State’s geography and history appear to disagree. Because the men and women they elected to represent them have decided to end “special privileges” that are not enjoyed by Universal, SeaWorld, and Legoland — all of which occupy the same business space as Disney.

The bottom line — and the lesson to be learned — is this: If one enjoys “special privileges,” one should keep his head down and not rock the boat in a way that may cause undue attention. Because Disney is not special; it is an entertainment theme park. And it does not deserve to be treated differently. It got away with special treatment for 55 years — then it got too big for its britches and got sat down and reminded that it just doesn’t matter that much. Disney overstepped and is paying for it.

It couldn’t happen to a nicer bunch of folks.



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The rescission of Disney's "special" status will likely end up in court, but it is difficult to imagine a decision that would differentiate between Disney and its direct competitors. After all, Universal, SeaWorld, and Legoland all have an interest in a level playing field.



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