

Gov. DeSantis Is Right To Attack Disney, And The GOP Should Follow

News broke Wednesday the Florida Senate had [passed a bill](#) to dismantle Walt Disney World's half-century-old "independent special district" status, an arrangement whereby Disney has been allowed, since 1968, essentially to govern itself. Gov. Ron DeSantis says Disney's self-governing status should be subject to review, to ensure that it is still "appropriately serving the public interest."

Good. Disney is reaping its just reward for inserting itself into the political debate about Florida's parental rights bill, which Disney lost in spectacular fashion. Republican governors and lawmakers across the country should be taking notes.

This is how you deal with big corporations that try to throw around their weight and force woke policies on voters and families. You punish them, not just because they deserve it, but also, as Voltaire famously put it, *pour encourager les autres*.

Disney was no doubt betting that DeSantis and Florida Republicans would do what Republicans have almost always done in the face of woke corporate pressure: simply back down. That's what South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem did last year when at the behest of the NCAA she [vetoed a bill](#) that would have protected girls' sports from trans ideologues.

Same with Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who [vetoed a](#)

[measure](#) banning genital mutilation and hormone treatments for minors (he was subsequently overridden by the state legislature). Same goes for then-Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, who in 2015 infamously caved to corporate pressure and [gutted his state's religious freedom law](#).

Indeed, at any other time and place, with almost any other Republican governor and legislature, Disney would almost certainly not have faced any consequences for wading into the debate over the parental rights bill. After all, since when do Republicans actually wield power against the enemies of their voters and defend ordinary families from powerful woke corporations? Almost never.

By breaking that mold, DeSantis has set a clear example that other GOP governors and state lawmakers should follow. If a corporation like Disney wants to insert itself in a political battle that has nothing to do with its business — in this case, a fight over whether to prohibit classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity to children in kindergarten through the third grade — then it should be prepared to pay a heavy cost.

Simply put, corporations that do what Disney did, publicly lobbying against the rights of parents to have a say in whether their young children are exposed to sexually explicit subject matter, have marked themselves out as enemies of a free people and should be treated as such. If Disney wants to make war on families in Florida, then the proper role of a democratically elected government is to go after Disney with every power at its disposal.

Maybe that means they lose tax breaks that were once justified for purely economic reasons. Same for the special status Walt Disney World has enjoyed all these years, governing a 40-square-mile area in

central Florida as it sees fit.

This isn't about the economic arguments, not anymore. Whatever merit there was to the notion that Disney "serves the public interest" before the fight over parental rights has completely vanished. Now that Disney has taken a stand against families and parents, there can be no doubt: Disney does not serve the public interest in Florida, and Floridians owe it nothing.

Conservatives should understand this, but not all of them do. Over at National Review, Charles Cooke has decided to stand athwart history, as it were, [and yell](#): "Independent special district status is complicated!" His complaint with DeSantis is that there was no need to punish Disney over its opposition to the parental rights bill because the bill passed. Disney lost, DeSantis and Republicans won. Moreover, he adds, until a month ago, "Walt Disney World's legal status was not even a blip on the GOP's radar. No Republicans were calling for it to be revisited, nor did they have any reason to."

Did they not? What changed in the last month that might have prompted them to revisit the issue? Could it be that Disney came out publicly as a very real threat to Florida parents who don't want their second-graders instructed about sexual orientation and gender identity? Could it be that the fight over the parental rights bill revealed Disney as something other than an entertainment brand and Walt Disney World as something other than a beloved family theme park? Could it be, in fact, that this entire affair has exposed Disney as a malign force in Florida's civic life?

That Cooke can't grasp this, and instead attacks DeSantis by tediously explicating the particulars of Florida's independent special districts,

shows the naiveté of conservatives in general and Republican politicians in particular on woke corporations pushing extremist agendas. Cooke argues there are lots of independent special districts in Florida, and that Walt Disney World “is unique not in its *type* but only in its *particulars*.” Orlando International Airport and the Daytona International Speedway, he notes, have a similar independent status. Why single out Disney?

To ask is to answer. Did the Orlando International Airport or the Daytona International Speedway wage a public campaign against the parental rights bill, and while doing so commit to pushing a “queer” agenda on children? No, they didn’t. Disney did. That makes all the difference.

If the airport and the speedway had behaved the way Disney did then yes, Florida lawmakers should have absolutely punished them. (Thanks to the impending revocation of Walt Disney World’s special status, it’s unlikely the airport or speedway or any other entity in Florida with a similar status will decide to follow in Disney’s footsteps, which is part of the point.)

Cooke further laments that singling out Disney is a mistake because, “Walt Disney World is deeply rooted in Florida’s soil, as a result of agreements the Florida legislature made with it in good faith. To poison that soil over a temporary spat would be absurd.”

But here again Cooke — and really, it’s not about Cooke, it’s about the accommodationist strain on the right that he and NR represent — misunderstands the nature of the fight. This is not a “temporary spat,” as [Disney itself has made clear](#). It’s an ideological and cultural war that corporations like Disney will never stop waging.

For many years now, only one side in this war has been crying “no quarter” before every battle. The other side has pretended not to believe it and surrendered time and again, with predictable results. Finally, DeSantis and Florida Republicans have taken the enemy at their word, and responded in kind. Republicans everywhere should go and do likewise.

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