

# DAILY BREEZE

## **Hypocritical Disney stumbles into a dumb culture war fight**

PUBLISHED: April 17, 2022 at 10:31 a.m.

Disney has really stepped in it, hasn't it?

The company found itself thrust into the latest culture war trap, the so-called "Don't say gay" bill.

After publicly opposing the law, the company has drawn the ire of the right, from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis threatening to pull the company's special privilege of operating as its own independent government around Disney World to being targeted by the far-right as "groomers."

It's rough.

Before I proceed, I'll disclose three things: First, I don't like Disney. Second, I actually agree with the company on the Florida law. Third, I don't care for Disney's loudest critics on the right. I will explain those points in that order.

As an editorial writer for the Orange County Register for eight years, I've only ever thought of Disneyland as a monument to crony capitalism due to their decades of influence over the city of Anaheim in order to extract subsidies.

After political pressure, that's less of a problem today. In 2018, Disney and the city of Anaheim dropped a \$267 million subsidy agreement related to construction of a new resort. Disney also dropped a 2015 agreement with the city shielding Disneyland from a ticket tax. Then-Mayor Tom Tait declared a "reset" in Anaheim-Disney relations.

But I remember those years. Disney still benefits from a \$510 million 1997 bond that's still being paid off.

It's one thing to resist unjustified government intrusions; it's another to bend government to get special favors.

Here's the other thing about Disney, I don't watch their movies, so I have no idea what they put out these days. But I do know that they filmed a live-action version of "Mulan" in Xinjiang, where the communist government of China is committing genocide. In September 2020, the Associated Press reported that the credits of the film "thank propaganda departments in Xinjiang and the public security bureau of Turpan, a Uighur-majority city in the region."

Ostensibly, Disney is willing to take a stand against human rights violations, but only in Florida. If Disney wants to make a bold stand that's actually meaningful, it will put the Chinese government on blast. They won't, naturally, because they care more about access to the Chinese market than about human rights. That's their right as a business, of course, but I'm not impressed with any of their public pronouncements given the context.

Oh and another thing, as a Southern Californian, I've only ever thought of Disneyland as that place where they sell unjustifiably expensive churros.

So, yeah, no. Crony capitalists, commie bootlickers, expensive churro sellers. Not my kind of people, not my kind of business.

### **But, they're right about the Florida bill.**

So with all of that said, yeah, I think they're right to oppose the Florida law, even if I personally think they should've just stayed out of it because, no, businesses aren't obligated to take public political stands.

Here's what the law in question states: "Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards."

On the one hand, a number of polls found that, actually, a lot of people, even a majority, think that sounds like a sensible law. Because, sure, I can imagine someone reasoning that maybe teachers shouldn't be talking to kids who can barely wrap their heads around one plus one is two about sexual orientation and the intricacies of gender identity.

On the other, as far as laws go, if you read it closely, the text is actually pretty vague. What constitutes "instruction"? Does reading certain stories or books that happen to involve gay characters count as instruction? Does it count when a teacher tries to thoughtfully respond to a question from a student that touches on matters of sexual orientation or gender identity?

The vague nature of the law just invites litigiously-minded parents to sue school districts over perceived violations of the law. It could stop a teacher from doing their job of teaching.

The Florida legislature, for context, rejected amendments that would have cleared up some of these ambiguities. According to Newsweek, Sen. Lauren Book proposed an amendment "seeking to carve out exceptions to allow discussing sexual orientation and gender identity as they pertain to family structures, objective historic events, bullying prevention and a student's individual education plan."

There are also legitimate reasons to oppose blanket state diktats on education, regardless of the subject matter. Should state governments police what teachers say? Isn't that better left to as local a level as possible? As PEN America argues, "This censorious legislation inserts the heavy hand of legislators into the schoolroom, adjudicating what stories can be told, what subjects discussed and what families acknowledged."

Ultimately, Florida moved ahead with a vague, broadly applied law that just invites litigation.

Unpacking all of this only makes sense when one realizes that, as usual, this is all just a conjured-up culture war battle for political points.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis doesn't care about the vagueness of the law. He realizes that fighting culture war battles is good for his brand and his long-term political prospects. He knows that bashing the woke excesses of the left is popular among a growing number of Americans and he knows that right-wing outlets will amplify whatever he says or does.

If he actually cared about possible outlier cases of teachers going beyond what anyone would consider reasonable, he should've called on the Florida legislature to craft legislation in a more narrow and deliberative way. But he didn't care about that. He has his eyes on the presidency, so ramming through a poorly crafted law that puts LGBTQ+ kids, parents and teachers in an unfortunate situation was worth the cost.

### **The far right reminds me why I'm not a right-winger**

The cynical political motives of DeSantis for me are bad enough. Then I remember that, really, it wasn't that long ago that America was having intense fights over gay marriage, of all things. Many on the right still don't like any discussion of LGBTQ+ people.

While some right-wingers will still throw around that old line about "the gay agenda," most have just morphed this concern into a bizarre fixation on "grooming."

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Georgia, is representative of this faction of the right. She recently told Business Insider that "anyone who opposes anti-grooming laws like the one in Florida is pro-child predator. Stop sexualizing children."

Everywhere on right-wing outlets or Twitter you'll see the word "groomer" being thrown around. There have even been protests at Disneyland by people holding signs taking on "pedophiles" and "groomers."

But is one really promoting child grooming by opposing the Florida law? No.

These are insane people. But then I realize insanity is everywhere.

I look to the left and I see fringe wokesters and liberals too afraid to challenge the lunatics on their left. I look to the right and can barely find any actual conservatives anymore who aren't also insane people.

Cathy Young, a fellow at the Cato Institute, put what's happened around this bill well.

"Under assault from the right, the left digs in and defends even unreasonable things while the right becomes even more strident. Hyperbole flies: Right now, liberals are blaming the bill's supporters for teenage suicide, while conservatives are accusing its opponents of wanting to 'groom' children for sex. The real losers are sane citizens," Young wrote.

It's all so stupid.

I hate politics.