

## Disney World Challenges Florida Governor DeSantis in Lawsuit over State Control Measures



In a dramatic turn of events, the Walt Disney Company has filed a lawsuit against Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, accusing him of jeopardizing billions of dollars in business as a means of retaliation against the company's outspoken criticism of his policies. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Florida on Wednesday, comes amidst an escalating dispute over the authority of the municipal board that governs Florida's theme parks, which is set to undergo a controversial takeover by representatives appointed by DeSantis. The board in question oversees government services at Disney World, an iconic theme park that employs 75,000 individuals.

Disney alleges that Governor DeSantis has orchestrated a targeted campaign of government retaliation designed to punish the company for exercising its right to protected speech. According to Disney, these actions threaten its business operations and jeopardize its economic future in the region while violating its constitutional rights. The company further argues that DeSantis's threat to invalidate publicly noticed and duly agreed contracts governing services at the theme park is blatantly retaliatory, anti-business, and unconstitutional. Consequently, Disney seeks a court order declaring the governor's actions unlawful.

Responding to the lawsuit, Taryn Fenske, communications director for DeSantis, stated via email, "This lawsuit is yet another unfortunate example of their hope to undermine the will of the Florida voters and operate outside the bounds of the law. We are unaware of a company's legal right to operate its government." As a Republican and a potential candidate for the 2024 presidential race, DeSantis initiated a feud with Disney last year when the company voiced criticism against a law supported by the governor, which imposed restrictions on classroom instruction regarding sexual orientation or gender identity.

In response to Disney's criticism, DeSantis took control of the board responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of Disney's theme parks in Florida and appointed his own representatives. However, Disney managed to navigate around the governor's efforts by implementing last-minute changes that weakened the influence of the municipal authority hand-picked by DeSantis. In a recent development, DeSantis vowed to surpass the changes made by Disney and further threatened the company, even suggesting that the state might construct a prison near the theme parks.

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Governor DeSantis has taken several controversial measures within his state, partly to raise his profile as a potential candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. According to FiveThirtyEight, which aggregates polls, former President Donald Trump has widened his lead over DeSantis among Republicans, with a margin of 51% to 24%. Meanwhile, Disney's shares remained relatively stable in New York trading at 12:30 p.m.

As one of Central Florida's largest taxpayers, Disney contributed over \$1.1 billion in state and local taxes last year. Additionally, the company is one of the State's largest employers, providing tens of thousands of jobs to individuals whom Disney calls "cast members."

The outcome of this lawsuit could have significant implications for both Disney and the governance of Florida's theme parks. With both sides firmly entrenched in their positions, the legal battle is likely to unfold in a contentious manner. As the case progresses, it will be closely monitored to determine the potential impact on Disney's operations, the rights of corporations in relation to government actions, and the broader dynamics between businesses and political entities.