

## Experts Warn DeSantis' Strong Statements Could Have Repercussions in Disney Lawsuit



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and the Walt Disney Co (DIS.N) have been embroiled in a year-long war of words that has now escalated to a legal battle. Legal experts suggest that DeSantis's previous criticisms of the entertainment giant could potentially backfire as the lawsuit unfolds.

In response to the state's intention to terminate Disney's virtual autonomy in central Florida, where its theme parks are located, Disney has filed a lawsuit against DeSantis. This move comes after the company openly criticized a Florida law prohibiting classroom discussions on sexuality and gender identity with younger children. DeSantis repeatedly attacked Disney in response, referring to them as "woke Disney."

Disney alleges that DeSantis's actions constitute a "targeted campaign of government retaliation." The company's 73-page lawsuit presents evidence from DeSantis's memoir, fundraising materials, interviews, and announcements, asserting that Disney had "crossed a line" into political territory and needed to be reined in.

Ken Paulson, a professor at Middle Tennessee State University and director of the school's Free Speech Center, suggests that the governor may regret his previous verbal attacks on the company. Paulson believes that DeSantis might face consequences for his actions in a court of law.

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On the other hand, DeSantis views Disney's lawsuit as a politically motivated attack and accuses the company of evading accountability. His spokesperson stated that the governor's office is unaware of any legal basis that would grant a company the right to operate its own government or maintain special privileges, referring to the longstanding district where Disney World is situated.

Legal experts acknowledge that DeSantis may have valid policy reasons for reconstituting the authority of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, which Disney previously enjoyed. However, if Disney can prove that this was done as an act of retaliation, the company has a strong case.

The clash between Florida's largest employer, Disney, and Governor DeSantis, who harbors presidential aspirations, began when Disney criticized the Parental Rights in Education Act, a bill banning discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity for young students. DeSantis responded by mobilizing the Republican legislature to wrest control of the special district from Disney.

Disney's lawsuit alleges that the state's actions amount to a "targeted campaign of government retaliation" orchestrated by Governor DeSantis in response to Disney's protected speech. The U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United case ruled that governments cannot restrict the political speech of corporations and other entities under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

As the legal battle unfolds, how the courts will interpret the complex interplay between Disney's claims of retaliation and DeSantis's policy justifications remains to be seen. The outcome of this lawsuit could have significant implications for both the future of Disney's autonomy in central Florida and Governor DeSantis's political aspirations.