

CURRENT AFFAIRS

What's the Fuss about Disney vs. Florida? by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



There is a political war going on between Disney and the government of Florida. In a democracy, a government represents the people of the land whereas business is about providing products and services. The point where it becomes tricky is when business intersects with politics. That's what the crux of the problem is with Disney vs. Florida.

Florida's Parental Rights in Education law, which prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity for students in kindergarten through third grade, was signed into law at the end of March 2022 by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis. The bill is dubbed "Don't Say Gay" by its opponents, albeit the law has nothing to do with LGBTQ rights or lifestyles. It's basically about protecting parental rights so that parents get to decide what their children learn about sexuality and gender and when. Yet opponents believe the way

the law is written is too vague and is intended to further oppress LGBTQ people and topics.

After Gov. Ron DeSantis signed Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill into law, the Walt Disney Company condemned the legislation and vowed to help have it repealed. Disney's chairman, Robert Alan Chapek stated the following:

"Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill, should never have passed and should never have been signed into law," the company said in a statement. "Our goal as a company is for this law to be repealed by the legislature or struck down in the courts, and we remain committed to supporting the national and state organizations working to achieve that."

Following Disney's public stand against Florida's Parental Rights in Education law, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill to dissolve Walt Disney World's private government that provides municipal-like services for its 27,000 acres in the Sunshine State. At the bill signing ceremony DeSantis said to Disney:

"You're a corporation based in Burbank, California, and you're gonna marshal your economic might to attack the parents of my state. We view that as a provocation, and we're going to fight back against that."

Corporations have tried to influence government policy forever and it is growing with time. Their tactics include:

1. Providing campaign funding through political action committees (PACs).

2. Partnering with think tanks to shape policy agendas.

3. Hiring public relations, legal, and lobbying firms to develop and strengthen relationships with policymakers.

4. Securing public and political posts to support corporate interests from within the governance.

The critics of Disney's social statement argue that Disney's Board of Directors' role is to manage company policy in the best interest of shareholders and customers. It is a business for profit, not a political action entity. Unfortunately, Disney has entered into a fringe woke policy that has pitted itself against state law, many customers, and shareholders. It's a lose-lose situation for Disney.

The supporters of Disney state otherwise. According to them, Disney has a right to speak and support or not support legislation without government consequences. Their customers have a right to react with their dollars.

I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's statement on a corporation's social responsibility. He said, "companies should act as trusteeships, valuing social responsibility alongside profits."

Gandhi's concept of trusteeship helped in the socio-economic growth of India. These trusts also worked to enhance social reforms like rural development, women empowerment, and education. I'll leave it up to the readers to decide Whether Disney's fight against Florida meets the corporations' social responsibility concept envisioned by Gandhi or not.