

Trouble in Paradise

THE WALT DISNEY
COMPANY'S
RESPONSE TO
FLORIDA HOUSE
BILL 1557



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Abstract

After a Florida law prohibiting the discussion or instruction of sexual orientation or gender expression in classrooms was passed, the Walt Disney Company publicly opposed the law, despite the repercussions that it would have on its special district status. This case study examined how Disney navigated through discrepant expectations related to its stance on the bill from different stakeholders, including its employees and the state government. The case also investigated how Disney's stance on this bill impacted the company's reputation and financial standing. This case is important because it highlights the initiatives that businesses today must take in order to follow their stances on social issues with meaningful action. This case highlights a dilemma for contemporary companies: is there any space for them to hesitate when it comes to taking a stance on controversial social-political issues?

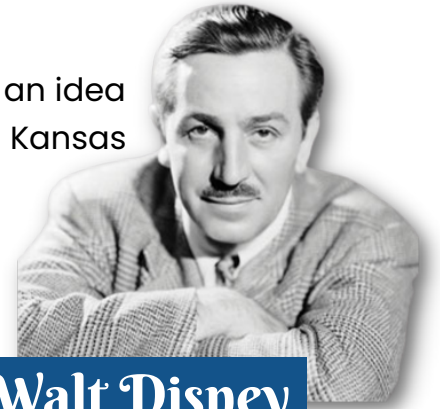


The
WALT DISNEY
Company

Once Upon A Time

The Start of The Wonderland

The Walt Disney Company was established in 1923 with an idea that Walt Disney had when he arrived to California. Back in Kansas City, he created a cartoon called Alice's Wonderland, which he planned to sell to a distributor as a series. In the same year, the distribution of Disney's Alice Comedies was purchased on October 16th, and this became the official start of the company (The Walt Disney Company, 2020).



Disney went on to create more animations and expanded to documentaries and live-action films in the 1950s. During this decade, Disney also opened its first amusement park, Disneyland, in 1955 in Anaheim, California. Walt Disney World was opened in 1971 in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, which helped the company establish their dominance in the US entertainment industry (Britannica, 2003). After Walt Disney's death in 1966, the company expanded its productions units to include films for mature audiences, and also revitalized its animation division with films such as Toy Story in 1995, the world's first full-length computer animated film. In 1996, the company acquired ABC television network and became the world's largest media and entertainment corporation (Britannica, 2003).

Disney's Mission

The mission of The Walt Disney Company is "to entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling, reflecting the iconic brands, creative minds and innovative technologies that make ours the world's premier entertainment company." (The Walt Disney Company, 2020, para. 1). Disney has shown commitment to this mission by striving to create content, experiences, and products that inspire and impact their consumers worldwide.

Disney's Structure

Disney Parks, Experiences, & Products



Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution

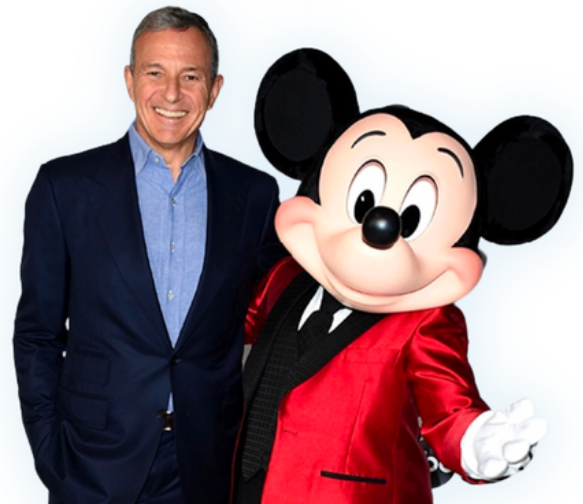


Currently, The Walt Disney Company is "a leading diversified international family entertainment company and media enterprise" that include two major sections: parks, experiences, and products; and media and entertainment.

The company comprises four content groups– studios, general entertainment, sports, and international– that are "focused on developing and producing content for direct-to-consumer, theatrical, and linear groups" (The Walt Disney World, 2020, para. 2). The business empire "continues its legacy of creating world-class stories and experiences for every member of the family" (The Walt Disney Company, 2020, para. 2).

Disney's Leadership

The Walt Disney Company's leadership team is composed of 19 executive leadership members and 12 board of directors. The current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is Robert A. Iger, who took office on November 20, 2022 to succeed the previous CEO Bob Chapek. Mr. Iger also served as CEO and Chairman of The Walt Disney Company from 2005 to 2020 (Disney, n.d.).



CEO Robert A. Iger

Disney's Social Responsibility Initiatives

Disney also strives to leave a lasting impact on society with their three main social responsibility initiatives: 1) "World of Belonging" to celebrate an inclusive, respectful world. 2) "World in Balance" to help change the course of the planet's story by creating a healthier home for people and wildlife. 3) "World of Hope" to bring comfort, optimism, and joy to their communities and inspire hope. These initiatives were created in hopes of creating a better world by focusing on diversity and inclusion, the environment, and charitable giving (The Walt Disney Company, 2022).



The Plot Thickens

The "Don't Say Gay" Bill

The Florida State Parental Rights in Education Act, (House Bill 1557 or HB 1557 or "Don't Say Gay" bill) states that its purpose is to, "prohibit classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels or in a specified manner" (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, lines 21-23). To prohibit discussion around sexual orientation and gender identity, it 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," (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, lines 97-101). While it appears this may mean that certain topics will be allowed as long as they are in accordance with state standards, all discussion or instruction involving sexual orientation or gender identity is completely banned in classrooms grades kindergarten through third. For students who are in grades higher than third, instruction and discussion are only allowed as long as it is "age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards," (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, line 101).

It is not very clear what the regulations are around teaching these topics, and there is not a guide to what is deemed to be “in accordance with state standards,” (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, line 101). The bill sought to, “reinforce the fundamental right of parents to make decisions regarding the upbringing and control of their children, “ (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, line 7). It would stop schools from preventing the disclosure of “critical decisions affecting a student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being,” (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, lines 19-20).

The vague language of the bill does not specify what exactly constitutes as the “instruction” or “discussion” that is prohibited, making the law subjective. The bill also puts the responsibility of reporting violations of this law on the parents, as it seeks to strengthen parents’ rights regarding their children’s education (Nierenberg, 2022). Additionally, educators who are in violation of this law may face legal action with consequences of discipline or termination (National Education Association, 2022).



**FLORIDA
GOVERNOR
RON DESANTIS
SIGNS HB 1557
ON MARCH 28,
2022.**

Florida’s governor Ron DeSantis, along with Republican politicians and conservative organizations, heavily pushed this bill in order to stop what they called the “indoctrination” of young children and to give parents more control over what their children are being taught about in school (Migdon, 2022). Those who favor this bill agree with Gov. DeSantis who said, “It’s not something that’s appropriate for any place, but especially not in Florida,” (Diaz, 2022, para. 5) . This bill was eventually signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis on March 28, 2022 and took effect on July 1, 2022.



Organizations in opposition to the bill included corporations such as Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. and American Airlines Group Inc., who all signed a Human Rights Campaign petition opposing the bill (HRC, 2022). LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, including The National Center for Lesbian Rights, Equity Florida, and Family Equality all filed lawsuits against DeSantis, citing that the bill would, “stigmatize, silence, and erase LGBTQ people in Florida’s public schools,” (Lavietes, 2022, para. 1). The American Psychological Association (APA) also agreed with these arguments and opposed the bill. The APA's president, Frank C. Worrel, Ph.D. stated, “Prohibiting classroom discussion on these topics sends the message that identifying as LGBTQ is inherently wrong, stigmatizing and marginalizing children who may realize their difference at a young age. Psychological research has shown that increased social isolation and stigma can lead to depression, anxiety, self-harm and even suicide,” (APA, 2022, para. 2).

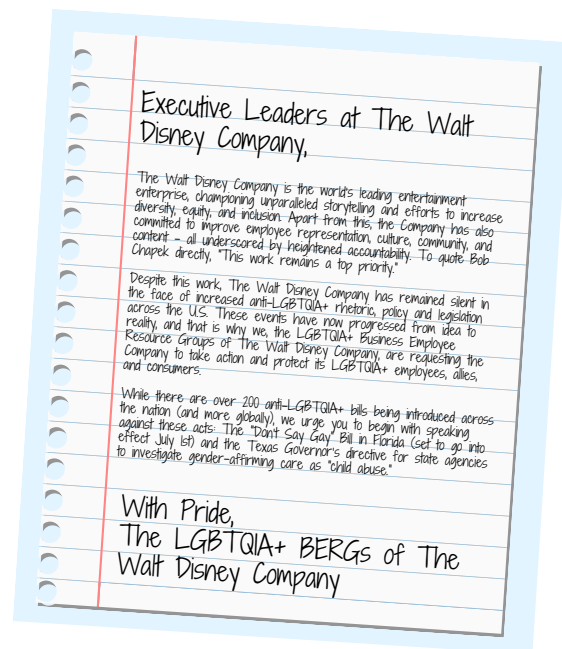
Due to the controversial nature of the bill and the proximity of the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, many looked to The Walt Disney Company for its response.

Battle Lines Drawn

Employees Speak Out

Initially, Disney had chosen not to speak in favor of or against the bill, although the company had a history of supporting LGBTQ+ rights (Johnson, 2022).

On February 28th Disney’s LGBTQIA+ Business Employee Resource Groups sent a letter to Chapek requesting the company “issue a public statement condemning anti-LGBTQIA+ policies in the U.S. ” (Maas, 2022, para.1). The letter reads, “together, we ask you: support our community – your employees and fans – as we have supported you. Act against these bills and others, lending your voice to those whose own have been silenced” (Maas, 2022, para. 21). **Please refer to Appendix A for the complete letter.**



IN THE LETTER, THE DISNEY EMPLOYEES URGED THE COMPANY TO:

1

Issue a statement to the public condemning anti-LGBTQIA+ policies and laws in the United States

2


End donations to anti-LGBTQIA+ policy and officials, aligning with the company's principles and priorities.

3

Provide security, support, and resources for employees and families that have been impacted by anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation.

Disney's silence continued while LGBTQ+ employees and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations such as the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), spoke out, protested, and held walkouts against Disney's silence, imploring the company to reject the bill (Johnson, 2022). On March 3rd, over 200 people gathered outside calling on the company to share its views on the bill (Didlake, 2022).



Benjamin Siemon 
@BenjaminJS

I am a LGBT animation writer at Disney and this is why I want the company I love to take a stand against the "Don't Say Gay" Bill. [#DisneySayGay](#) [#DisneyBoBetter](#)



1:51 PM · Mar 6, 2022 4,902 Retweets 354 Quote Tweets 16.7K Likes

On March 5, Disney employees began to speak out publicly in response to the company's silence on LGBTQ+ issues. Disney employees and creators with ties to the company began sharing their thoughts and feelings on social media using the hashtags [#disneysaygay](#) and [#disneydobetter](#). Several of the videos went viral on various social media platforms (Terrace, 2022).

Disney's Response to Employee Outrage

On March 7, 2022, former Disney CEO Bob Chapek released a memo to employees speaking out against the bill, but still refused to make a public statement rejecting it, instead saying that there are more effective ways to bring change (Maruf, 2022). **Please refer to Appendix B for the complete memo.**

"AS WE HAVE SEEN TIME AND AGAIN, CORPORATE STATEMENTS DO VERY LITTLE TO CHANGE OUTCOMES OR MINDS. INSTEAD, THEY ARE OFTEN WEAPONIZED BY ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER TO FURTHER DIVIDE AND INFLAME. SIMPLY PUT, THEY CAN BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AND UNDERMINE MORE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ACHIEVE CHANGE. I DO NOT WANT ANYONE TO MISTAKE A LACK OF A STATEMENT FOR A LACK OF SUPPORT. WE ALL SHARE THE SAME GOAL OF A MORE TOLERANT, RESPECTFUL WORLD. WHERE WE MAY DIFFER IS IN THE TACTICS TO GET THERE. AND BECAUSE THIS STRUGGLE IS MUCH BIGGER THAN ANY ONE BILL IN ANY ONE STATE, I BELIEVE THE BEST WAY FOR OUR COMPANY TO BRING ABOUT LASTING CHANGE IS THROUGH THE INSPIRING CONTENT WE PRODUCE, THE WELCOMING CULTURE WE CREATE, AND THE DIVERSE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS WE SUPPORT."

-BOB CHAPEK

However, the day after the memo was released, an article in Popular Information revealed that Disney had donated \$300k over the last two years to members of Florida legislature who were in favor of the bill, including \$50,000 to Gov. Ron DeSantis (Legum, 2022). On March 8, 2022, the bill passed the Florida State Senate, and on March 9, Chapek publicly stated that Disney opposed the bill saying, "We were opposed to the bill from the outset, but we chose not to take a public position on it because we thought we could be more effective working behind the scenes, engaging directly with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle," (Chapek, 2022).

Disney also pledged \$5M to organizations that protect LGBTQ+ rights, including the Human Rights Campaign who refused the donation (Maddaus, 2022). On March 11, 2022, Chapek apologized to employees for the silence against the bill saying, "I let you down. I am sorry," (Keck, 2022, para. 3). **Please refer to Appendix C for the complete letter.** Disney also pledged to stop making political donations due to the bill (Atterbury, 2022).

A Tale as Old as Time(line)

11
JAN

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11TH, 2022

HB 1557 IS INTRODUCED TO FLORIDA LEGISLATURE.

The Florida State Parental Rights in Education Act, which prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity was introduced.

24
FEB

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH, 2022

FLORIDA HOUSE PASSES GOP 'DON'T SAY GAY' BILL.

The bill was passed by Florida's House of Representatives on Feb. 24 and will soon be voted on by the Senate (Shanfeld, 2022; Izaguirre, 2022).

28
FEB

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28TH, 2022

DISNEY EMPLOYEES SEND A LETTER TO CEO CHAPEK.

Disney's LGBTQIA+ Business Employee Resource Groups sent a letter to Chapek requesting the company "issue a public statement condemning anti-LGBTQIA+ policies in the U.S.". At this point, the bill had passed the state's House of Representatives but had yet to reach the Senate (Maas, 2022).

3
MAR

THURSDAY, MARCH 3RD, 2022

RALLIES OCCURRED OUTSIDE DISNEY CALLING FOR ACTION.

The AIDS Healthcare Foundation held two rallies outside the Disney parks in Florida and California. Over 200 people gathered outside calling on the company to share its views on the bill (Didlake, 2022).

5 & 6
MAR

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 5TH & 6TH, 2022

LGBTQ DISNEY EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE COMPANY'S SILENCE ON TWITTER..

The AIDS Healthcare Foundation held two rallies outside the Disney parks in Florida and California. Over 200 people gathered outside calling on the company to share its views on the bill (Didlake, 2022).

7
MAR

MONDAY, MARCH 7TH, 2022

DISNEY EMPLOYEE'S TWITTER VIDEO GOES VIRAL & CHAPEK SENDS MEMO TO EMPLOYEES.

After weeks of silence, Chapek sent a memo to Disney employees speaking about the "Don't Say Gay" bill for the first time. He stressed the company's support for the LGBTQ+ community and for creating a more inclusive world (King, 2022).

8
MAR

TUESDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2022

THE BILL PASSES THE FLORIDA SENATE & DISNEY'S POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE REVEALED

Popular Information reveals that Disney had donated \$300k over the last two years to supporters of HB 1557 (Legum, 2022). The bill passed the Florida Senate the same day.

9
MAR

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9TH, 2022

CHAPEK PUBLICLY STATES THAT DISNEY OPPOSES THE BILL & PLEDGES \$5M TO LGBTQ+ ORGANIZATIONS.

Once the Human Rights Campaign got wind of Chapek's \$5 million pledge, they rejected the company's donation and demanded that Disney "build on their public commitment" and take "meaningful action" to combat the legislation (Bibi, 2022, para. 3).

10
MAR

THURSDAY, MARCH 10TH, 2022

LGBTQIA+ EMPLOYEES OF PIXAR AND THEIR ALLIES RESPOND TO CHAPEK'S INTERNAL MEMO

The LGBTQIA+ employees of Pixar, and their allies respond to Chapek's internal memo and public bill opposition statement with a letter. It refuted, point by point, the internal memo Chapek sent to employees earlier that week and also criticized the fact that the company "did not take a hard stance in support of the LGBTQIA+" at the shareholder meeting (Tapp, 2022, para. 1).

11
MAR

FRIDAY, MARCH 11TH, 2022

CHAPEK FORMALLY APOLOGIZES TO EMPLOYEES AND PAUSES THE COMPANY'S POLITICAL DONATIONS IN FLORIDA.

Chapek apologized to employees for the silence against the bill (Keck, 2022) and pledged to stop making political donations to supporters of the bill (Atterbury, 2022).

22
MAR

TUESDAY, MARCH 22ND, 2022

DISNEY EMPLOYEES STAGE WALKOUT & DISNEY COMPANIES RELEASE STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

Employees were still angered with CEO Chapek's late response to the Florida bill and wanted Disney to honor their list of demands that included further actions: WhereisChapek.com

28
MAR

SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH, 2022

HB 1557 IS SIGNED INTO LAW.

The "Don't Say Gay" Bill was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis (Diaz, 2022).

1
JULY

FRIDAY, JULY 1ST, 2022

HB 1557 TAKES EFFECT.

The new law takes effect in Florida almost 7 months after it was introduced (Diaz, 2022).

20
NOV

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH, 2022

CHAPEK STEPS DOWN AS DISNEY CEO AND IGER RETURNS.

Although there is not an official statement on why the immediate change, people speculate it has to do with the various crises Chapek has dealt with since taking over the position in 2020. These crises include; the coronavirus outbreak, the silence and then opposition of the "don't say gay" bill, and abruptly firing Disney's top television executive, all while customers grow furious over the increase in prices (Barnes, 2022).



...Conscience be Your Guide

Stakeholder Reactions

Disney Employees

Disney's response to the bill was not well received by its employees. Ben Siemon, actor and writer, whose credits include Disney's *DuckTales*, responded to the controversy saying, "Please don't be fooled by this half-hearted triage. The bill was allowed to pass with no public position from Disney, and they still intend on funding all the politicians that passed it" (Blair, 2022, para. 12).

Dana Terrace, the creator of the Disney Channel animated series "The Owl House", which features multiple LGBTQ characters, tweeted: "I'm f***ing tired of making Disney look good." In a video attached to that tweet, which has received more than 2 million views, Terrace criticized the memo that Disney CEO Bob Chapek had sent to employees on March 7. In the memo, Chapek had stated that the company was more effective at bringing about change through its inclusive content than by speaking out in the political arena (Keegan, 2022).

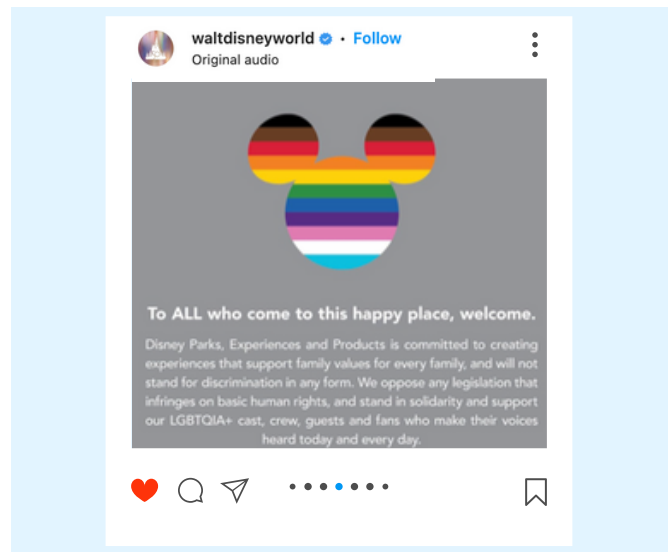
On March 10, the LGBTQIA+ employees of Pixar, and their allies responded to Chapek's internal memo and public bill opposition statement with a letter. It refuted, point by point, the internal memo Chapek sent to employees earlier that week and also criticized the fact that the company "did not take a hard stance in support of the LGBTQIA+" at the shareholder meeting (Tapp, 2022, para. 1). **Please refer to Appendix D for the complete letter.**





Employees were still angered with CEO Chapek’s late response to the Florida bill and wanted Disney to honor their list of demands that included further actions listed onWhereisChapek.com, including commitment to protect its employees from hateful legislation. On March 22, Disney employees staged walkout to demand action against the 'Don't Say Gay' bill. More than 100 employees in different parts of the company joined a full-length walkout and protest (Alfonseca, 2022).

Amid the March 22nd protests, several Disney companies such as ABC News, Disney Plus, Walt Disney World, Pixar and more released statements of support on social media (Alfonseca, 2022).



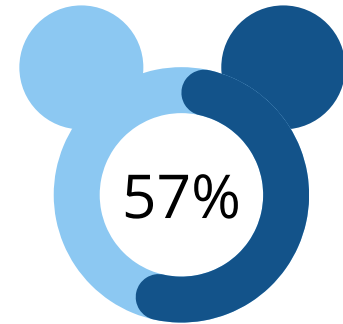
LGBTQ+ Groups

Once the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) got wind of Chapek’s \$5 million pledge, they rejected the company’s donation. Joni Madison, Interim President of the HRC declined the offer from Disney demanding that the company “build on their public commitment” and take “meaningful action” to combat the legislation (Bibi, 2022, para. 3). After months of discussion between The Human Rights Campaign and Disney, the HRC ultimately accepted the donation from Disney in September. The HRC also gave praise to Disney for having “stood firm” in support of the LGBTQ community (Maddaus, 2022).

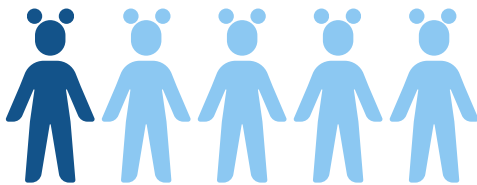
Consumers

It seems that the frustration surrounding Disney's handling of LGBTQ+ themes is primarily coming from within the company. However, the majority of consumers in the US are reportedly satisfied with the actions taken by Disney in response to the bill in Florida.

In fact, according to a poll conducted by the Morning Consult, a global decision intelligence company, **57 percent** of self-identified Disney fans said they were not even aware of Chapek's eventual denouncement of the bill (Shevenock, 2022).



Among the potential actions that companies could take in response to the legislation, about **53 percent** of self-identified Disney fans said they opposed closing down stores and amusement parks in response to the bill, while only **1 in 5** fans said they support these actions.



On the other hand, about **47 percent** of Disney fans polled supported the idea of the company donating money to LGBTQ+ organizations. About **36 percent** preferred the company issue a statement against the bill (Shevenock, 2022).

Florida Government

Disney is Florida's largest employer through its Walt Disney World theme park and resort in Orlando, therefore, the company has significant political influence in the state of Florida (Atterbury, 2022). Florida Governor Ron DeSantis reportedly said in an interview that he believed it was a mistake for Disney to get involved in the issue of anti-LGBTQ legislation, and that he had warned the company that it would not work out well for them (Leonard, 2022).

As recently as November 2022, Disney CEO Robert Iger, was quoted telling employees that he was ready for things to quiet down and was sorry to see Disney dragged into that battle. After hearing these remarks, Governor DeSantis stated, "We didn't drag them in. They went in on their own, and not only opposed the bill, they threatened to get it repealed" (Richardson, 2022, para. 4).

Corporate World

The Human Rights Campaign and Freedom for All Americans advocacy groups published a petition condemning anti-LGBTQ legislation. It reads, “we are deeply concerned by the bills being introduced in state houses across the country that single out LGBTQ individuals – many specifically targeting transgender youth – for exclusion or differential treatment” (Freedom For All Americans, 2022, para. 1).



Along with The Walt Disney Company, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Pinterest, Target, Mattel, and Lululemon are among the 200 companies that quietly signed this petition (Constantino, 2022).

Happily Ever After?

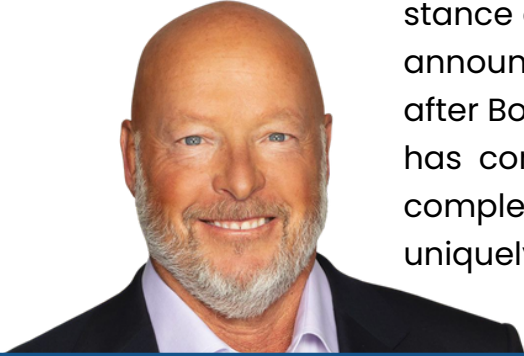
Financial & Reputational Impact on Disney

Though imperfect, Disney’s reaction to HB 1557 was a bold stance to take for the company considering the risk that it poses.

In April, Governor DeSantis announced he would be dissolving Disney’s Reedy Creek Improvement District which has allowed Disney complete control over the 40 square miles of land where Disney World operates. Dissolving it would get rid of Disney’s exemptions from state regulations and property taxes (Allen, 2022). While many believe this decision was meant to punish Disney for speaking out against the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill, Desantis stands firmly behind the statement that he simply does not believe Disney should receive “special treatment” (NBCUniversal News Group, 2022).



The dissolving of Disney’s Reedy Creek Improvement District is expected to take effect in June 2023. This means that Disney would have to seek approval from local counties for construction projects, such as hotels and theme parks (Whitten, 2022).



BOB CHAPEK STEPPED DOWN AS DISNEY'S CEO ON NOVEMBER 20, 2022.

Disney is still dealing with the ramifications of its public stance of the "Don't Say Gay" bill. In November of 2022, Disney announced that Robert Iger would return as CEO of Disney after Bob Chapek stepped down from the position. "The board has concluded that as Disney embarks on an increasingly complex period of industry transformation, Bob Iger is uniquely situated to lead the company through this pivotal period," said board chair Susan Arnold in an official announcement (The Walt Disney Company, 2022). Iger served as Disney's Chief Executive from 2005 to 2020.

Chapek, who succeeded Iger as CEO in early 2020, had come under increasing criticism and scrutiny over the company's performance in the months prior (Calia, 2022). Although there is not an official statement on why the immediate change, people speculate it has to do with the various crises Chapek has dealt with since taking over the position in 2020. These crises include; the coronavirus outbreak, the silence and then opposition of the "don't say gay" bill, and abruptly firing Disney's top television executive, all while customers grow furious over the increase in prices (Barnes, 2022).

To Infinity and Beyond

Since the passage of Florida's HB 1557, Disney has been active to show its support to the LGBTQ groups, though it remains to be seen when it will regain the trust of its LGBTQ employees.

In May of 2022, Disney began to promote "pride collection" merchandise for the first time, with profits from the items sold donated to selected LGBTQ+ advocacy groups (Martin, 2022). "The Disney Pride Collection was created by LGBTQIA+ employees and allies at The Walt Disney Company and is a reflection of their incredible contributions and place at the heart of the company. We stand in solidarity with our LGBTQIA+ community everywhere" the company stated on its website (The Walt Disney Company, 2022, para. 1).



DISNEY'S "PRIDE COLLECTION"

In addition, Disney has also made efforts to include LGBTQ representations in its films. In June of 2022, Disney released the movie "Lightyear", which featured Pixar's first same-sex kiss on screen (Watercutter, 2022). In November of 2022, Disney revealed its new film "Strange World", which featured Walt Disney Animation Studio's first openly gay lead character (Zee, 2022).



**"LIGHTYEAR" FEATURED
PIXAR'S FIRST SAME-SEX KISS
ON SCREEN RELEASED ON
JUNE 17, 2022.**



**"STRANGE WORLD " FEATURED
WALT DISNEY ANIMATION
STUDIO'S FIRST OPENLY GAY
LEAD CHARACTER RELEASED ON
NOVEMBER 23, 2022.**

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Appendix A

Employee Letter to Disney Leadership

Executive Leaders at The Walt Disney Company,

The Walt Disney Company is the world's leading entertainment enterprise, championing unparalleled storytelling and efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion. Apart from this, the Company has also committed to improve employee representation, culture, community, and content – all underscored by heightened accountability. To quote Bob Chapek directly, "This work remains a top priority."

Despite this work, The Walt Disney Company has remained silent in the face of increased anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, policy and legislation across the U.S. These events have now progressed from idea to reality, and that is why we, the LGBTQIA+ Business Employee Resource Groups of The Walt Disney Company, are requesting the Company to take action and protect its LGBTQIA+ employees, allies, and consumers.

While there are over 200 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills being introduced across the nation (and more globally), we urge you to begin with speaking against these acts: The "Don't Say Gay" Bill in Florida (set to go into effect July 1st) and the Texas Governor's directive for state agencies to investigate gender-affirming care as "child abuse."

As one of the largest employers in Florida, one currently relocating even more employees to the state, it is the Company's utmost responsibility to protect these individuals. The enacted bill is designed so Florida schools "may not encourage classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students." The bill does not define "age-appropriate" and has the power to enact further limitations, giving parents the ability to sue schools if they believed the schools violated any provisions of the law.

Legislation of this manner specifically targets the most vulnerable members of our community, and data proves that a lack of support leads to an increase of suicide rates within LGBTQIA+ youth, a group that is already three times as likely to attempt suicide than non-LGBTQIA+ youth. We ask that you stand by our community as you have in the past, such as the actions taken in response to the tragedy of Pulse Nightclub or the boycott of Georgia's proposed "Free Exercise Protection Act" bill in 2016.

This is not only a grim reality for these communities but poses threats to the Company's growth in creativity and innovation. By remaining silent, the Company signals to LGBTQIA+ creators, artists, and current and future business leaders that it does not stand for the principles it cites. Losing support of our community would be a critical loss for the Company as it is a key source for monetary and verbal support across all segments, particularly for the content, products, and services that represent us. This is particularly vital in the growing Gen Z market, as ABC News reported last week that over 20% of Gen Z Americans now identify as LGBTQIA+.

Unfortunately, some Company spending habits are very disconcerting: in 2020 the Company donated \$190,100 to the campaigns of Florida legislators who eventually voted "yea" in support of enacting the "Don't Say Gay" bill. It is with these concerns that we feel the Company not only has a moral and ethical obligation to stand up for our community and correct these wrongs, it also has a financial responsibility.

Together, we ask you: support our community – your employees and fans – as we have supported you. Act against these bills and others, lending your voice to those whose own have been silenced. We ask you to lead by example: Tell the story of how The Walt Disney Company is for all families with these three actions:

- Join other corporations and issue a public statement condemning anti-LGBTQIA+ policies in the U.S.
- End donations to anti-LGBTQIA+ policy and officials, aligning with Company principles and priorities
- Provide security, support, and resources for employees and families across the country, especially in states like Texas and Florida, impacted by newly passed anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation.

Just this week, the TWDC CSR report highlighted critical pillars: People, Culture, Community, and Next Generation, while these exact ideals are under attack. This is not a matter of policy, but a signal to everyone that the LGBTQIA+ community belongs. We cannot just reimagine a better tomorrow, we must create one.

With Pride,

The LGBTQIA+ BERGs of The Walt Disney Company

Source: Maas, J. (2022, March 10). *Disney CEO Received Letter From LGBTQ Staff Pleading for Support Before 'Don't Say Gay' Bill Passed Florida Senate*. Variety. <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/disney-lgbtq-staff-letter-dont-say-gay-bill-bob-chapek-1235200825/>

Appendix B

Bob Chapek's Memo to Employees

Team,

Before getting to the heart of my message, I want to acknowledge all those impacted by the invasion of Ukraine, especially our team in Europe and our employees around the world who have family in the region. This is an unimaginably difficult time, and my thoughts are with you. I also want to thank the ABC News team covering the horrific events there. Their courage and dedication to informing the world during this crisis is exemplary.

On Friday, I met with a small group of Disney LGBTQ+ leaders to discuss controversial legislation pending in Florida that would impact their communities. I want to thank them for a meaningful, illuminating, and at times deeply moving conversation. I told the group I would write to the entire company with my thoughts on the issues we discussed. I wish every one of our employees could have heard not just the passionate voices in the room, but the bravery, honesty, and pride those voices expressed. It is a conversation I will not forget.

One common theme was disappointment that the company has not issued a public statement condemning the legislation. That disappointment was compounded by the fact that, while not perfect, our company has a long history of supporting the LGBTQ+ community—and in fact, has played an important role in the personal journeys of so many of our employees.

I want to be crystal clear: I and the entire leadership team unequivocally stand in support of our LGBTQ+ employees, their families, and their communities. And, we are committed to creating a more inclusive company—and world. I understand that the very need to reiterate that commitment means we still have more work to do.

I also believe you deserve an explanation for why we have not issued a statement. We are going to have a more fulsome conversation about this at the company-wide Reimagine Tomorrow Summit in April, but I will preview that discussion now as it is so timely.

As we have seen time and again, corporate statements do very little to change outcomes or minds. Instead, they are often weaponized by one side or the other to further divide and inflame. Simply put, they can be counterproductive and undermine more effective ways to achieve change.

I do not want anyone to mistake a lack of a statement for a lack of support. We all share the same goal of a more tolerant, respectful world. Where we may differ is in the tactics to get there. And because this struggle is much bigger than any one bill in any one state, I believe the best way for our company to bring about lasting change is through the inspiring content we produce, the welcoming culture we create, and the diverse community organizations we support.

There's a reason content is at the top of this list. For nearly a century, our company's stories have opened minds, inspired dreams, shown the world both as it is and how we wish it could be, and now more than ever before, represent the incredible diversity of our society. We are telling important stories, raising voices, and I believe, changing hearts and minds.

Encanto, Black Panther, Pose, Reservation Dogs, Coco, Soul, Modern Family, Shang-Chi, Summer of Soul, Love, Victor. These and all of our diverse stories are our corporate statements—and they are more powerful than any tweet or lobbying effort. I firmly believe that our ability to tell such stories—and have them received with open eyes, ears, and hearts—would be diminished if our company were to become a political football in any debate.

Powerful content that changes hearts and minds only springs from inclusive cultures, which not only attract and retain the best and most diverse talent, but also give those employees the freedom to bring forth ideas that reflect their lives and experiences. We must work together to ensure Disney always remains such a place.

In terms of our communities, we are and will continue to be a leader in supporting organizations that champion diversity. In 2021, we provided nearly \$3 million to support the work of LGBTQ+ organizations. And, we have a long history of supporting important events like Pride parades, and for being there in times of need, just as we were following the Pulse shooting in Orlando. All this is why we have earned a 100% rating from the Human Rights Campaign for 16 years in a row.

Finally, I want to address concerns about our political contributions in Florida. While we have not given money to any politician based on this issue, we have contributed to both Republican and Democrat legislators who have subsequently taken positions on both sides of the legislation. I can also share that Geoff Morrell, our new Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, will be reassessing our advocacy strategies around the world—including political giving—as he begins to integrate the communications, public policy, government relations and CSR teams.

Our company has been a force for inclusion for a long time—and that will not change on my watch. We all have a role to play in this effort—from the Cast Members who make magical memories for fans and families of all kinds, to storytellers who take audiences on journeys to new storyworlds that illuminate our own, to everyone in between who is responsible for ensuring our culture lives up to our values. I hope we will all continue rowing in the direction of a better tomorrow.

—Bob Chapek

Source: Weprin, A. (2022, March 7). *Disney CEO Bob Chapek addresses company's response to Florida's "Don't say gay" bill*. The Hollywood Reporter. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/disney-ceo-bob-chapek-florida-dont-say-gay-bill-response-1235105879/>

Appendix C

Bob Chapek's Formal Apology to Employees & LGBTQ+ Community

To my fellow colleagues, but especially our LGBTQ+ community,

Thank you to all who have reached out to me sharing your pain, frustration and sadness over the company's response to the Florida "Don't Say Gay" bill. Speaking to you, reading your messages, and meeting with you have helped me better understand how painful our silence was. It is clear that this is not just an issue about a bill in Florida, but instead yet another challenge to basic human rights. You needed me to be a stronger ally in the fight for equal rights and I let you down. I am sorry.

Our employees see the power of this great company as an opportunity to do good. I agree. Yes, we need to use our influence to promote that good by telling inclusive stories, but also by standing up for the rights of all.

Starting immediately, we are increasing our support for advocacy groups to combat similar legislation in other states. We are hard at work creating a new framework for our political giving that will ensure our advocacy better reflects our values. And today, we are pausing all political donations in the state of Florida pending this review. But, I know there is so much more work to be done. I am committed to this work and to you all, and will continue to engage with the LGBTQ+ community so that I can become a better ally. You will hear more about our progress in the coming weeks.

I truly believe we are an infinitely better and stronger company because of our LGBTQ+ community. I missed the mark in this case but am an ally you can count on—and I will be an outspoken champion for the protections, visibility, and opportunity you deserve.

—Bob Chapek

Source: Shanfeld, E. (2022, March 7). *After 'don't say gay' bill backlash, Disney CEO expresses 'unwavering support' for LGBTQ community.* Variety.

<https://variety.com/2022/film/news/disney-ceo-bob-chapek-support-lgbtq-1235197938/>

Appendix D

2nd Employee Letter to Disney Leadership

We are writing because we are disappointed, hurt, afraid, and angry. In regards to Disney's financial involvement with legislators behind the "Don't Say Gay" bill, we hoped that our company would show up for us. But it didn't.

Monday's email, "Our Unwavering Commitment to the LGBTQ+ Community", rang hollow. It began with the claim that Disney has a long history of supporting the LGBT community, but Disney Parks did not officially host Pride until 2019, in Paris alone. Disney has a history of shutting down fan-created Pride events in the parks, even removing same-sex couples for dancing together in the 1980's. Additionally, Disney began capitalizing on Pride in 2018 with The Rainbow Mickey Collection, (while de-emphasizing the terms like LGBTQ+ and not even featuring explicitly LGBTQIA+ pieces such as Pride flag pins until 2021). To this end, it feels terrible to be a part of a company that makes money from Pride merch when it chooses to "step back" in times of our greatest need, when our rights are at risk.

The second claim stated that "corporate statements do very little to change outcomes or minds". However, the very email making this claim opened with a corporate statement regarding the ongoing situation in Ukraine. Eight days after Russia invaded Ukraine, Disney paused the release of theatrical films in Russia and announced "We will make future business decisions based on the evolving situation." Following the siege on the capital in 2021, Disney stopped all political donations to members of Congress who had objected to the presidential election results. In 2016, Disney told the state of Georgia: "We will plan to take our business elsewhere should any legislation allowing discriminatory practices be signed into state law" in response to the controversial Religious Liberty bill. By taking a stand, Disney directly affected the legislative outcome in Georgia. It has been proven that Disney's corporate statements can and do make a difference.

Finally, we come to the push for Content as the answer. We at Pixar have personally witnessed beautiful stories, full of diverse characters, come back from Disney corporate reviews shaved down to crumbs of what they once were. Nearly every moment of overtly gay affection is cut at Disney's behest, regardless of when there is protest from both the creative teams and executive leadership at Pixar. Even if creating LGBTQIA+ content was the answer to fixing the discriminatory legislation in the world, we are being barred from creating it. Beyond the "inspiring content" that we aren't even allowed to create, we require action.

We are calling on Disney leadership to immediately withdraw all financial support from the legislators behind the "Don't Say Gay" bill, to fully denounce this legislation publicly, and to make amends for their financial involvement. While signing on to donate to the HRC is a step in the correct direction, the shareholder meeting on Wednesday made it clear that this is not enough. Throughout the shareholder meeting, Disney did not take a hard stance in support of the LGBTQIA+ community, they instead attempted to placate "both sides" – and did not condemn hateful messages shared during the question and answer portion of the meeting. This is not what it means to "unequivocally stand in support of our LGBTQ+ employees, their families, and their communities."

Disney taking a stand by honoring their company values has changed the course of legislation in the past. If Disney is true in its values, it will take a decisive public stand against the discriminatory legislation occurring in Florida and offer tangible support for the LGBTQIA+ communities affected by bigoted legislation sweeping the country. Stand against this bill in Florida and against the similar bills in South Carolina, Arizona, Virginia, and Tennessee. Stand against the transphobic legislation in Texas, Iowa, Utah, Kansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, and Alabama. Many hateful groups are attempting to eradicate us through legislation – we need you to stand with us entirely, not in empty words.

This matter is not something that can wait until Reimagine Tomorrow in April, or Pride Month in June. This matter needs to be addressed now. This is urgent. 42% of LGBTQIA+ youth seriously considered suicide in 2021, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth, with a large factor being the lack of support that these discriminatory legislations enable. Disney claims to care for the welfare of children, but supporting politicians like this directly hurts one of their most vulnerable audiences. There are lives at stake and Disney's support could save those lives. "We still have more work to do," your email said. This is that work.

Signed with Pride,

The LGBTQIA+ employees of Pixar, and their allies

Source: Vary, A., & Jackson, A. (2022, March 10). *Disney censors same-sex affection in Pixar films, according to letter from employees*. Variety. <https://variety.com/2022/film/news/disney-pixar-same-sex-affection-censorship-dont-say-gay-bill-1235200582/>



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