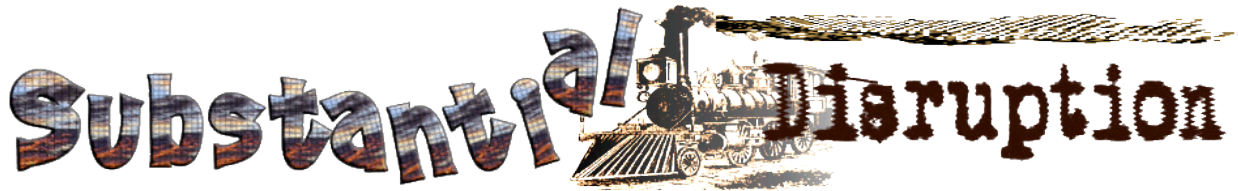


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Mickey Died for Your Sins

By Mike Tully

Mickey roared, and Governor Ron DeSantis roared back. Florida's most notorious rodents have drawn the battle lines. DeSantis, who virtually sprays ambition, relishes the fight against the other mouse.

This epic battle of the *mus musculi* was inspired by [Florida House Bill 1557](#), "An act relating to parental rights in education." Don't let the name fool ya. Under that anodyne title lies a bill laced with sinister intent.

The bill's critics refer to it as the "don't say gay bill." They argue the legislature's intent is not to protect parents' rights, but to discourage any discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. DeSantis argues the phrase "don't say gay" does not appear in the text of the legislation, which is true. But the bill contains the phrases "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," and the context is questionable.

While the bill does not explicitly prohibit school-based discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity, it hardly encourages it. The only language addressing sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibitive. That's a pretty clear message.

When coupled with provisions in other parts of the bill, the legislation's dark consequences come into focus.

The first part of the legislation addresses parental disclosure. Paragraph 1 requires parental notification "if there is a change in the student's services or monitoring related to the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being and the school's ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for the student." Well, duh. But consider the language that follows, requiring that schools "encourage a student to discuss issues relating to his or her well-being with his or her parent or to facilitate discussion of the issue with the parent."

Every experienced educator has met a student who needed a trusted adult in whom to confide what the student was not ready to tell the parents. The appropriate response in most cases is not to perpetuate the concealment, but to support and comfort the students until they are ready to confront their parents. HB 1557 discourages that.

The next paragraph elaborates on this theme: "A school district may not adopt procedures or student support forms that prohibit school district personnel from notifying a parent about his or her student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being..." The bill's authors know there may be risk involved (not unlikely if the disclosure relates to sexual orientation or gender identity). School personnel can withhold such information "if a reasonably prudent person would believe that disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect."

How many teachers know parents well enough to make that determination? You don't get that perspective from parents' night. More troubling, the "abuse, abandonment, or neglect" language is too narrow. It fails to address one of the greatest dangers facing students grappling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity: self-harm.

[The Trevor Project notes](#) that "Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ... with LGBTQ youth being four times more likely to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for suicide, and to attempt suicide than their peers." The bill ignores this danger.

The third paragraph forbids classroom instruction on "sexual orientation or gender identity" in grades K - 3. No school in Florida provides that. The same paragraph prohibits discussion of these topics in older grades "in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards." Since this is new legislation, the "state standards" that clarify this provision do not yet exist.

Here comes the punchline: Any parent who has "concerns" relating to the subject matter of the legislation can act on it. "Concern" is not a common term of art in the law and the bill does not define it. Parents can take their "concern" to a special magistrate that the school district has to pay for, win or lose. Or parents can take the district to court. If they win, the district must pay their legal fees and costs. Courts can also award monetary damages.

Nobody asked for this mess. Why is it happening? Back to the mice.

DeSantis, in flagrant disregard of [the Peter Principle](#), wants to be president. A dim fellow with little fluency in actual issues, the Governor believes the White House can be won by scaring white suburbanites into fearing LGBTQ people and monetizing the fear into donations and votes. How else do you explain why [right-wing talkers accuse opponents of the Florida bill](#) as either being "groomers" or making life easy for groomers? HB 1557 was written in the ink of DeSantis' ugly and divisive political aspirations.

When the bill passed, the Disney Company reacted like Sleeping Beauty: it kept sleeping. But [Disney employees warned about the hidden dangers of the legislation](#). The company's benign response, said the employees, "failed to match the magnitude of the threat to LGBTQIA+ safety represented by this legislation." The employees demanded the bill be repealed, and the Disney company endorsed that. Employees also demanded Disney stop contributing to several politicians, including DeSantis.

That got his attention. On April 1, a date for which he is rapidly becoming the patron saint, DeSantis [threatened to repeal legislation that grants the Mouse autonomy](#). Thanks to a bill passed in 1967, "the park oversees its own land use, regulates its own buildings, roads, and essentially provides the services a municipal or county government typically would."

"Nice Kingdom you have there," De Santis told Mickey. "What a shame if something happened to the Magic!"