

# Opinions

## You did what you had to do

By Leo Chappelle

"... the little town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve ... where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."

According to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia.com, that was how Garrison Keillor would introduce his weekly reports on the fictional town of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. Not counting a 6-year break, for 37 years A Prairie Home Companion, the name of Keillor's radio program, split sides with laughter at low key comedy about small town life. Going off the air finally in 2016 after first airing in 1974, the show developed a virtually legendary reputation among its followers.

In 2017 after the show's run had ended, its famous host got into some sort of flap about sexual misconduct (at the age of 75 no less) and Minnesota Public Radio terminated his contract. It's always odd to me, considering how the political Left, and Keillor has definitely been a "card carrying member" of that persuasion, can get so

fuzzed up and prudish about sexual behavior in view of what they generally support.

Nonetheless, the show illustrated, if nothing else, that laughing at ourselves was a superior alternative to overdosing on a reality that would, it seems, prefer to drag us down into the hell of our own depressing circumstances. I think there is a distinction between humor and malicious ridicule and finding humor in who we are and what we do is not the same thing as forsaking our values. And we must never forget that. It can make life more bearable.

No, I don't have a joke to tell you. Sometimes reality is preposterous enough without anyone's help, and, if one may believe one's eyes, sufficient examples appear all the time. Having made a point of ridiculing local government, though, does not require that I think they are really bad people. They're not. I just can't get them to do what I think they should do. And sometimes laughing about it is all that is left to do.

Fortunately, enough voters agreed to con-

tinue to tax themselves this past week so that certain vital functions of our local government can proceed. It's interesting that so many voted against the tax renewals, however.

Voter turnout in such elections is typically low, but the parish wide renewal of 8 mils drew only 9.7% of eligible voters. Over 90% of parish voters did not care whether the parish government had money to function or not. And of those who bothered to vote, 39% were ready to shut it down. The renewal is for ten years, so it is probably fortunate that the question won't be raised again for another decade. Optimistically assuming that ten years from now there will be anybody left to go to the polls, of course.

According to the Louisiana Secretary of State website, we have 6,462 eligible voters in Catahoula Parish. Only 382 voted "yes". That means 94% of all voters were either opposed to the tax renewal or didn't care if it were defeated. And yet it passed. Think about that.



## THE RICH LOWRY COLUMN

### Let Disney Be an Example

Just like that, tyranny has descended on Florida.

The state legislature, with the support of Gov. Ron DeSantis, voted to repeal the "special independent district" enjoyed by Disney for half a century.

This is a sign, we are told, of the advent of an American authoritarianism that brooks no dissent -- Disney criticizes a measure supported by the Florida GOP, the so-called Don't Say Gay bill, and immediately gets targeted.

There's a reason this fight escalated to this point, though. Disney was the aggressor in the battle over the education bill, lied about it, and pledged to work to repeal it.

Even though the bill had nothing to do with Disney whatsoever -- nothing to do with its product, its business model, or its employees. The company got pushed into its stance based on pressure from a woke segment of its employees and from progressives on the outside.

Disney's case against the bill relied on the smear that the legislation somehow threatened gay or trans people. In fact, the law merely seeks to exclude inappropriate material from being taught to young children in the classroom -- an objective that once would have been considered utterly banal.

"Classroom instruction," the law says, "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."

Based on that, Disney went to the mattress-

es. And it did so, not to serve its shareholders, enhance its profitability, protect its intellectual property, or align itself with its vast and politically diverse customer base.

This was, shockingly, an iconic American brand making itself into a free-floating weapon of woke cultural politics in response to the social and political influence of a small number of vocal progressives.

Like so many companies before, Disney calculated the risk/reward of gratuitously taking up a left-wing political and cultural fight and considered it all reward, no risk. The Florida legislature decided to convince it that it was wrong.

Republicans have fantasized about exacting revenge on woke corporations before, but to no effect. Disney's problem is that it had a glaring vulnerability in the form of an arrangement that can easily be portrayed as a special favor.

The provisions allowing Disney to govern itself in its special independent district are so extensive that one analyst refers to the so-called Reedy Creek Improvement District as "the Vatican with mouse ears."

"Never before or since has such outlandish dominion been given to a private corporation," Florida writer Carl Hiaasen notes in his book "Team Rodent." "Disney owns its own utilities. It administers its own planning and zoning. It composes its own building codes and employs its own inspectors. It maintains its own fire department. It even has the authority to levy taxes."

For good measure, it can build its own airport and nuclear power plant.

Now, that's all scheduled to go away in a year's time. Obviously, it is not a good practice

for government to retaliate against a business, even a business enjoying a special status.

This fight could have welcome effects, though, if it convinces Disney that it made a mistake by allowing itself to get bullied and cajoled into becoming a combatant in the culture war, or if it convinces other corporations that there's a potential price to be paid for joining woke mobs.

Republicans don't want corporations to become tools in advancing their agenda; they just want them to exit the culture wars and focus, once again, on their business, an outcome that would lower the temperature in the country's cultural fights at least a little.

Ideally, Disney and the Florida legislature work out a renewal of the company's special district before it is set to expire, and the house of mouse -- and other corporations seduced into making themselves de facto left-wing pressure groups -- resolves to stick to its core competency and mission.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.  
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