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Orange and Osceola County House Democrats Vote to Oppose HB 9B

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Today, the Florida House of Representatives passed **HB 9B**, a bill that renames the Reedy Creek Improvement District to the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District and gives Governor DeSantis the sole power to name all five members of the board. Last April, the Governor signed **SB4-C** (2022), ordering the dissolution of certain special districts including Reedy Creek on June 1, 2023 in response to the Walt Disney Company's opposition to **HB 1557** (2022), also known as Don't Say LGBTQ+.

This punitive move by the Governor sent a chilling effect across the state that no business entity would be allowed to have an opinion that differs from his without retribution. All House Democrats from Orange and Osceola counties unanimously opposed this bill on the House floor.

"Florida House Republicans just approved the hostile takeover of Reedy Creek while admitting that the district still keeps all of the same tax perks," said **Representative Anna V. Eskamani (D-Orlando)**. "Surprise, surprise all of the talk about corporate accountability was not only performance but an attempt to disguise the true intent of this bill: to punish Disney for defending LGBTQ+ people. It also sends a chilling effect to businesses and private citizens across Florida that if you publicly oppose the Governor you will be punished. It's a sad day for freedom of speech in the so called 'free' state of Florida."

"I'm disappointed that the legislature is now wasting taxpayer dollars to bully, punish, and take control of a private business that dared to speak out against our Governor's attacks on marginalized communities," said **Representative Kristen Arrington (D-Kissimmee)**. "This is an unprecedented event. Our Governor, through his appointees, will have control of a private entity. All of this is happening because a Florida business exercised their 1st amendment rights."

"Today I stood to speak as a representative to thousands of Orange County residents who work and play in the Reedy Creek Improvement District. We are losing focus on the things that matter most to the citizens of Florida," said **Representative LaVon Bracy Davis (D-Orlando)**. "This issue isn't about charters or firefighters, this is

about retribution and retaliation to get back at a company that used their first amendment right to take a stance on behalf of targeted groups. This is about an organization that had the gumption and gall to speak out against the Don't Say Gay Bill, and stand up for marginalized people. Today the target is the LGBTQ+ community, tomorrow it's another marginalized group. I'm disappointed that my colleagues across the aisle are turning a blind eye to the "writings on the wall" and following the lead of those flexing their muscles and engaging in this power grab."

"Floridians are worried that in the future, the Governor will take more action against corporations and other institutions if they have an opinion that does not align with his," said **Representative Rita Harris (D-Orlando)**. "This bill sends a message from Governor DeSantis to businesses in our state that dissent will not be tolerated in Florida and that is chilling free speech."

"This bill is more proof that the Governor does not respect private businesses and only wants to further his political agenda no matter the cost," said **Representative Johanna López (D-Orlando)**. "Central Floridians will pay the cost of this legislation."

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