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Common Cause, et al. v. Cord Byrd

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Common Cause, et al.)
)
v.) 4:22-cv-109
)
Cord Byrd)

)

TRANSCRIPTION OF VIDEO RECORDING
PRESS AVAILABILITY WITH
SENATE PRESIDENT WILTON SIMPSON
APRIL 20, 2022

DIGITAL EVIDENCE GROUP
1730 M Street, NW, Suite 812
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 232-0646

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2 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: I think that's a very
3 good question, actually. When you look at the other
4 theme parks in the state, clearly, there's already a
5 model. You can take any other model in the state
6 and say, hey, why don't we look at that first to
7 make sure that we're not, you know, making this
8 process a little more difficult than it should be.
9 And then, secondly, I think that the Disney folks
10 will get their legal team together. They'll meet,
11 obviously, with our legal teams in the House, and in
12 the Senate, and governor's office, perhaps, and
13 start putting a plan together to see how much of
14 this is going to get unraveled, as you would say.

15 I believe there will be -- over the next
16 year, there will be a real deep dive on the
17 opportunities and really bring a light to all of the
18 different things that are inside this Reedy Creek
19 facility. So I think that's where we'll be. And I
20 think it's just a matter of getting the teams
21 together and sorting through it. I think it's that
22 simple.

23 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: If this was so
24 important, why wasn't it handled during the regular
25 session? Why did it suddenly appear out of nowhere

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1 at the last minute like this?

2 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: Well, here's the good
3 part. So why now? Why not next special session?
4 Why not a month ago? Why now is, is we have more
5 than a year to undo this now. So by doing it this
6 early, we have until next June or July to get this
7 put together. So we actually are giving ourselves
8 more time to be thoughtful by doing it now rather
9 than a month from now even.

10 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: But, Mr. President,
11 let's put aside the topic at issue. Let's just talk
12 about the people. How would you as a landlord in
13 Citrus County appreciate it if Citrus County
14 Commission decided to suddenly to take up a pass and
15 put in place a wall in less than 72 hours, in which
16 no one had a chance to even see it? Do you think
17 that's a good way for the Legislature or for
18 democracy to function, where the members of the
19 public have little or notice that you all are about
20 to undertake such major undertaking?

21 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: I think anytime one of
22 our large corporation with special opportunities in
23 the state shine more light on themselves than maybe
24 they wish they have, we then, as a Legislature, will
25 take a look at what is actually in this document.

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1 There's eminent domain powers in this document.
2 There is the ability to build a nuclear facility in
3 this document. And so I don't know how the end will
4 come, but I know that this is a very worthy process
5 that we're undertaking, and I think that whatever
6 comes out of it will be better than what we have
7 today.

8 (Cross talk)

9 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: (Indiscernible) Disney
10 that isn't operating the way it is Osceola County,
11 Orange County, their concerns, frankly, that they're
12 going to get dumped on for \$2 billion of debt.

13 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: You know, it's amazing
14 how we look at this, and we say, well, there's a
15 billion dollars of debt. There might be \$2 billion
16 of debt. I can assure you, based on looking at
17 Disney's balance sheet, they're making a lot of
18 money on those assets. And to those counties that
19 would take assets and liabilities, this would be a
20 certain economic boon for those counties, if that
21 would actually happen.

22 I do believe there will be a responsible
23 way to unwind the assets and the debt, if we get to
24 that point, in which Disney would maintain their
25 portion of those assets. There would be

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1 infrastructure needed to operate their theme park,
2 and the counties would take over more traditional
3 role, as in every other theme park in this state,
4 with maybe police, maybe fire and other things that
5 they would want to do themselves -- the counties
6 would want to do.

7 Now, the question is, and nobody asks this
8 question: how much more efficient is this going to
9 make those counties? In my county of Pasco County,
10 we have seven cities, and four or five of them had
11 independent fire departments and police
12 opportunities years ago -- 20, 30 years ago, and it
13 became unaffordable.

14 So as over time has happened, the
15 firefighters in the fire departments have melted
16 into the county system because it was -- it made it
17 more efficient. It took out enclaves that were not
18 getting the type of attention they needed. Same
19 thing with police service and law enforcement. I
20 believe if you look at this scope, the way this is
21 laid out amongst those counties and cities, you can
22 probably draw a lot of efficiencies and actually
23 save those taxpayers a lot of money by going through
24 this process.

25 That is actually what we'll be taking a

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1 look at, and I assume that we will have good
2 information to make those decisions on, and as they
3 will have good information to make those same
4 decisions on. So ultimately, this could be a more
5 efficient operation once it's done, because it will
6 be a seamless operation rather than multi-
7 jurisdictional.

8 (Cross talk)

9 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: What is agreed upon
10 so far with property insurance?

11 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: We've agreed that --
12 the Governor made an announcement the other day that
13 we were going to come back, hopefully sometime in
14 May, to take a look at it.

15 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Mr. President, I want
16 to get back to Gary's question because I don't think
17 you answered it. By springing the Disney bills on
18 the Legislature at the last minute, is it fair to
19 the public, who would have wanted to weigh in on the
20 legislation impacts?

21 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: What I think is, I
22 think that a lot of attention has been brought to
23 Reedy Creek development in the last 30 days. And so
24 by that bringing attention onto themselves in a lot
25 of cases, it brought a lot of attention by

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1 legislators, as you've seen in the last 30 days.
2 And once we start opening up Reedy Creek and looking
3 and see what else inside of it, it was determined by
4 this Legislature that we needed to take action that
5 could either lead to no additional action or more
6 action.

7 All we've done today is said that we're
8 going to sunset this a year from now, if there's no
9 further action. Here's the good part: there are
10 going to be many committee meetings, and this
11 Legislature is going to be back in session long
12 before next June. And there will be many
13 negotiations between now and then, I would expect,
14 on this issue.

15 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: (Indiscernible) tax
16 credits. This Florida Legislature has given Disney
17 hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks just
18 in the last couple of years. Why didn't you reveal
19 that if you wanted to retaliate?

20 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: First of all, we don't
21 retaliate against business in this state. Second of
22 all, we don't raise taxes, and so we're not looking
23 for raising taxes. We're not looking for
24 retaliation. We're looking and saying this is a
25 organization amongst others that have many powers

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1 that we do not believe they should have in 2022.

2 They have eminent domain powers. They can
3 build a nuclear facility, and they have many other
4 powers that I do not believe that the public would
5 approve of if we were doing this today and not in
6 1967.

7 So there's nothing punitive about this.
8 And we are the most pro business, family-friendly
9 state in the Union, as we all know here. And we're
10 going to continue to be that.

11 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Notwithstanding the
12 special privileges that Disney has -- Representative
13 Fine openly admitted that this was all about going
14 after Disney yesterday on the floor. So does that
15 really send a message that this is a free state if
16 the Legislature is going after corporations
17 (indiscernible)?

18 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: I cannot speak to
19 Representative Fine. I can only speak to me and the
20 Florida Senate. And so that could be his opinion,
21 but certainly that is only his opinion.

22 Thank you for being here today.

23 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Sir,

24 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: Uh-huh (affirmative)?

25 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: (Indiscernible) map in

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1 January. Right now that map has been offered to the
2 court as an alternative map. It was just brought up
3 by Democrats in the house today as possibly a better
4 map than the one that you guys approved today. What
5 did you feel about that map compared to the one that
6 they attached today, and would that be a
7 satisfactory option for the Senate if the Senate
8 (indiscernible) ultimately effective in 20022?

9 PRESIDENT SIMPSON: I think that through
10 the last decade, and through our constitutional
11 amendments that we did about a decade ago here in
12 the state of Florida, 12 years ago, I believe, that
13 the judiciary has been very active in this area. I
14 think that the maps that we drew, looking through
15 the lens of only the state constitution, was
16 different than when you apply the filter of the
17 federal constitution and 14th amendment.

18 I think that Senator Rodriguez laid out a
19 very strong case for why this map is better than the
20 map we drew previously, taking into consideration
21 the federal constitution in addition to the filters
22 of the state constitution. So I think the court is
23 clearly -- whichever map it was going to be, is
24 going to be adjudicated. And I believe that we have
25 a much stronger position today than we did when we

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1 left two months ago. Thank you.

2 (END OF VIDEO RECORDING)

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1 CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPTIONIST

2 I certify that the foregoing is a true and
3 accurate transcript of the digital recording provided
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5 I do further certify that I am neither a
6 relative, nor employee, nor attorney of any of the
7 parties to this action, and that I am not financially
8 interested in the action.

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Julie Thompson, CET-1036

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