

Disney, Universal give political gifts

by UPI

ORLANDO, Fla. - Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando have shelled out big gifts to the Democratic and Republican parties in Florida, campaign finance records show. The Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel reported Sunday that Disney and Universal gave more than \$571,000 worth of in-kind contributions -- including donations of food, drinks, hotel rooms, meeting space and theme-park tickets -- to the two major political parties from 2001 through 2007. The theme parks say part of the reason they allow their facilities to be used is to showcase the properties. "It's really important for us to work closely with policymakers so that they understand our business -- and so they understand firsthand, particularly," Disney spokeswoman Jacquee Polak said. "The better they understand our business, the more informed they are when they go to make policies." Universal spokesman Tom Schroder said the political events are "a great opportunity to showcase our destination." In addition to the in-kind gifts, Disney and Universal made \$1.5 million in direct campaign contributions during the same seven-year period. "This would seem to be another, more egregious instance of how corporate money can buy influence," said former Orange County (Fla.) Mayor Linda Chapin, who is calling for stronger local campaign-finance laws.

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