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California Gubernatorial Candidate Sued Over ‘Beast’ Campaign Appearance

May 25, 2021 BIANCA BRUNO

Republican John Cox says he wants to make “big beastly changes” to the way “Pretty Boy” Gavin Newsom is running California. But his use of a Kodiak bear as a living prop at campaign events has drawn fire from an animal rights group.



Screenshot from a John Cox for Governor ad posted to johncox.com.

SAN DIEGO (CN) — Not content with just dubbing himself the “nicest, smartest beast you’ll ever meet in California,” gubernatorial candidate John Cox brought a Kodiak bear on the campaign trail — a violation of local and federal animal welfare laws, an animal rights group claims in a lawsuit filed this week.

The Animal Protection and Rescue League, a San Diego-based animal welfare nonprofit, claims in a [9-page complaint](#) filed Monday night in San Diego County Superior Court that Cox illegally

brought a 1,000-pound Kodiak bear named “Tag” on his campaign stop in Shelter Island on May 11.

To illustrate his campaign slogan as “Beast John Cox” the California businessman [kicked off](#) his campaign in Sacramento this month to oust Governor Gavin Newsom during the special recall election this fall by bringing along Tag, much to the ire of animal rights advocates.

A week later during Cox’s [campaign stop](#) in San Diego, Tag again made an appearance.

The Animal Protection and Rescue League claims that appearance violates San Diego [municipal code](#) which provides “No person shall bring into or maintain within an area coming within the jurisdiction of this ordinance, any lion, tiger, bear ... irrespective of their actual or asserted state of docility, tameness or domesticity.”

Cox caused a nuisance by “holding events with a captive bear in public parks and on public rights of way and thoroughfares without any barrier interferes with the public’s use of such public spaces,” the group says.

“Defendants do not put up any barriers between the 1000-pound bear and the public at their events. While at one point defendants claimed to use an “electrified wire” to contain the bear, this would not be sufficient to stop a 1000-pound bear. Defendants later admitted the wire was not even electrified as claimed,” the group says in its lawsuit.

APRL want a San Diego Superior Court judge temporarily and permanently restrain Cox from “maintaining” the bear in the city of San Diego.

Cox’s press secretary Anthony Ramirez did not respond to a request inquiring whether Tag is scheduled to make additional appearances on the campaign trail or whether Cox had obtained a permit to show the animal in San Diego.

Instead, Ramirez responded: “The establishment is running scared from the bear because they don’t like that we’re going to make the big beastly changes California needs. Gavin Newsom and his insider friends want to distract from the important issues like slashing taxes, fixing the homelessness epidemic, and reducing the cost of living, so families and businesses don’t have to flee the state.”

Following the appearance of Tag in San Diego, officers with the San Diego Humane Society launched an [investigation](#). A spokeswoman for San Diego Humane Society told Courthouse

News that San Diego's municipal code "strictly prohibits this type of event." A violation of the local law is a misdemeanor.

"Humane officers have submitted their findings to the San Diego city attorney for prosecutorial review. It will be up to the City Attorney's Office on how to proceed," the San Diego Humane Society said in a statement.

Hilary Nemchik, a spokeswoman for San Diego City Attorney Mara Elliot, confirmed the case is currently under review.

Bobbi Brink, founder of big cat and exotic animal rescue Lions Tigers & Bears said in a phone interview she invited Cox to tour their sanctuary east of San Diego County in Alpine, California, but he "hasn't taken us up on the offer."

Brink went to Cox's campaign press conference May 11, but he did not meet with her or other members of the public and only fielded questions from news reporters, Brink said.

"I was hoping to talk to him and educate him about what happens to these animals. If he didn't get it then, he doesn't care about the animals at all," Brink said, adding, "I can't take a political side, I can only take the animals' side."

APRL is represented by San Diego-based attorney Bryan Pease. Pease told Courthouse News the group may amend the complaint to add additional parties, including Cox's gubernatorial campaign and the bear's owner if Cox does not agree to stop bringing the bear on the campaign trail.

"He's responsible — he's the one going around and touring with the bear," Pease said.