

Gulag Cowboy

In D.C.'s reeking swamp, "thoughtcrime" is close to a capital offense. By Marjorie Haun

We in the West have come to understand that government often regards us—especially the rugged individualists who live independently on the American range—as adversaries to be silenced and neutralized. The Hages, the Hammonds, the Bundys, LaVoy Finicum and scores more western ranching families have known the iron fist of government and the dear price of defiance. Following in their agonized footsteps is Couy Griffin, a New Mexico cowboy and county commissioner targeted by the FBI for the crime of praying on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

Inspired to Fight

Couy's story (pronounced "Coy") began in 1973 when he was born into a family that produced livestock and lumber in New Mexico's southern badlands. He says, "All my family are involved in the livestock industry in one way or another." Running both a cattle ranch and a sawmill in the West puts one in constant proximity to the federal government, and Couy's experiences would inspire his later venture into politics.

"Our sawmill got shut down about 25 to 30 years ago because of the Mexican spotted owl," he recalls. "And now this thing with the Mexican gray wolves is decimating our livestock herds. One of the biggest motivators I had moving into politics was to fight this. The Endangered Species Act is wrecking our way of life."

Couy took to sport with horses while in high school. "I competed in rodeos when I was young," he says. "I had a bull riding scholarship and went to the National Finals when I was in

college." Couy's athleticism and showmanship were unusually keen and after college he was recruited by Disney Paris to perform in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. "I moved to France in 1998 and did trick riding and roping and drove the stagecoach for the Wild West Show."

Living in France during the events of Sept. 11, 2001, crystalized Couy's sense of mission. "God molds and shapes us through different experiences. I believe that I was being prepared for the time we're in now. I



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was in Paris when 9/11 happened. I watched the second plane hit the tower while sitting in my hotel room," he relates. "The longer I lived in France and experienced its socialism and lack of faith, the prouder I was to be an American."

Cowboy Ministry

It was from there that Couy felt a calling to minister in the way only a cowboy showman can—travel the world on horseback and preach the Word of God. "As I sought for what I should do, I felt the Lord lay on my heart that I should ride a horse from the Golden Gate of San Francisco to the Golden Gate of Jerusalem," he says. "I didn't know how it was going to happen." But over time he completed four ministry trips through

Jerusalem on horseback, and Providence would soon lead Couy to the highest institutions of power.

Having run successfully for a commissioner seat in Otero County, which is situated just 80 miles north of the Mexico border, illegal immigration and its associated chaos weighed on Couy's mind and drew him to President Trump: "I appreciated his efforts towards border security. With me being a commissioner in a county close to the border, it was really impacting us. I wanted to offer him my visible support during that difficult political time."

With a knack for riding horses in unusual places, in February 2019 Couy gathered a group of seven riders he called Cowboys for Trump, or C4T, to ride 170 miles from Cumberland, Md., to Washington, D.C. Upon their arrival, Couy

received a phone call. "The president called me and we talked for about 20 minutes. I told him about the condition of our national forests here in New Mexico, and the threat of catastrophic wildfires. After talking to him, I had more confidence in who he



Couy Griffin founded *Cowboys for Trump* or *C4T*, in 2019 and his conspicuous support for the president would put him in the Oval Office as well as the crosshairs of the “D.C. Swamp.” OPPOSITE: Couy rides his unflappable sorrel, *Red*, through Salt Lake City during his *Cowboys for Trump* tour.

was as the president and, more importantly, as a person.”

C4T

Following that initial conversation, Couy took his cowboy ministry back to the streets on *Red*, a big, unflappable sorrel. With his truck, trailer, horse and an occasional photographer as companions, Couy crowned his pastoral mission with blazing shows of patriotism in cities across the country. *Red* was his door into many hearts. He says: “There’s been a lot of people I’ve met on the streets, and that’s the first time they’ve ever touched a horse. It’s something they will never forget.”

Still serving as an Otero County commissioner, Couy would again find himself in D.C. in September 2019. “I was at a Western States Affiliate meeting. I addressed the Department of Ag and reminded them that the president had promised to fix the forest issues in my county. I told them that if we had a bad forest fire I would come back to D.C. and kick one of their doors down! It wasn’t five minutes later that a man in a suit walked in the room and told me, ‘The President of the United States wants to see you in the Oval Office.’”

He sat down with the president at the Resolute Desk. “We had a great conversation, but the thing that really struck me about that day was when the president directed a guy to take me out to the South Lawn when he was walking out to the presidential helicopter. I could tell he was thinking about something, then his head jerked up and he looked at me and

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pointed my way. When he pointed at me, he told me a lot of things with just the expression on his face: ‘Don’t quit, don’t be threatened and don’t back down. Just continue to hold the line.’”

It may have been Couy’s conspicuous support for the president that made him a target of “the D.C. Swamp.” Undaunted, Couy continued to preach the Word and campaign until election night of 2020. “When the election results came in, I was shocked. I didn’t feel like, and I still don’t feel like there is a President Joe Biden. I thought it was a fraudulent election.”

January 6

Unabashed in his faith, Couy joined hundreds of thousands of incredulous Americans in D.C. on Jan. 6, 2021, to protest the certification of electors by the House of Representatives. “I felt it was my duty to stand on my constitutional right to protest. The group I was with was getting ready to go back to the car when a friend named Gary Chapman, a Christian recording artist, texted me and encouraged me to go pray with people on the steps of the Capitol.”

Couy went with that very intent but little did he know what lay in store, whether by design or happenstance, on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. “I had no intention of doing anything even remotely violent. I prayed with thousands of people and it was a great honor to be part of that.” Couy reflects: “I thought to myself that God has allowed me to be a part of some pretty amazing events, but they all pale in comparison to the experience I had on January 6. That was the most remarkable day of my life. I stood shoulder to shoulder with thousands of other Americans who were flying their flags, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and singing the National Anthem.”

He never entered the Capitol, and although Couy was vaguely aware of “foolish” conduct by some who were there, after a time he left. “I didn’t fight with security guards, I didn’t push through any barricades, I didn’t

do one thing that day that convicts my conscience at all.”

Taken into Custody

In disbelief at the events following the elections, Couy planned another trip to D.C. to witness the presidential inauguration. He explains: “These days I don’t believe anything the media tells or shows us. I just wanted to be there to see it with my own eyes.”

Couy arrived in D.C. on January 17 and was giving an interview to a media company when FBI agents surrounded him and took him into custody.

“I was interrogated. I felt like all I was going to have to do was talk to them and they would let me go. They wanted to see my phone.” He relented. “I have 10 years of my life on my phone, but I can stand behind it all so I let them see it, then they hauled me off to a jail somewhere in D.C.”

Charged with misdemeanor “trespassing into an authorized zone,” Couy was thrust into conditions unfit for the vilest criminal. “The first jail they took me in, I wouldn’t even put an animal in that place. The bed in my cell was moving with bugs. It was the most disgusting, inhumane place I’ve ever seen in my life. I spent the first 24 hours in there.” The FBI then moved him to the D.C. Department of Corrections. Couy soon learned the pain of noncompliance. “As they were processing me, they wanted me to take a COVID test and I told them that I wasn’t sick. I explained that I had my own opinion about the test and that I didn’t want to take one. I think I was the first one who ever refused to take a test, so they threw me in a cell in 24 hour-a-day solitary confinement for nine days.”

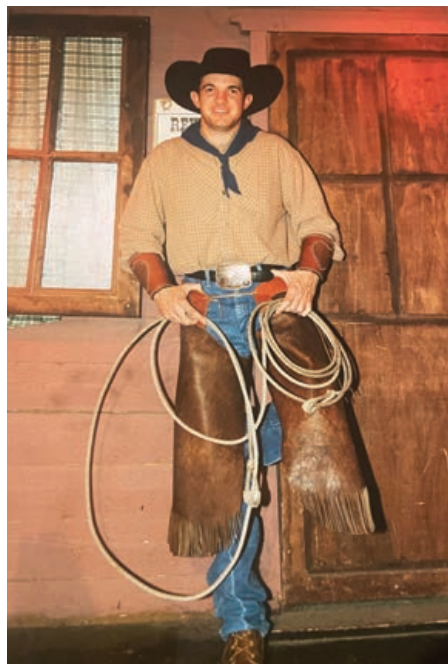
Under U.S. penal code, solitary confinement is as close to outright torture as you can get. “It’s one thing to consider solitary confinement,” he says, “but it’s quite another thing to be *in* solitary confinement. It is the most mentally traumatic place a person can be. When you’re locked in a cell with no human interaction and you don’t know what your future is, it’s a very, very, difficult thing to endure.”

Couy may have endured longer, but in complete isolation with no access to a phone, it was concern for his family that broke his defiance. “I had a standoff with them over the test, but on day nine I finally took it, and on day 10 I was able to call my lawyer. They held me for 11 more days. I was incarcerated for a total of three weeks.”



With his rights all but stripped away, Couy was given a Bible before being ordered to solitary. If the government thought it could defeat his will, the Bible was a tactical error. “I thank God they gave me a Bible because I stayed immersed in the Scriptures and prayer. If the government thought they were going to weaken me by putting me in solitary confinement, they should have never given me that Bible, because the only thing it did was make me spiritually stronger. I was locked up in a cell next to Jacob Chansley, the guy dressed in the buffalo head that they dubbed the ‘QAnon Shaman.’ When I was in there, I was concerned about him. He was very fragile.”

Couy continues: “We’re all different in some way and he’s very different. I feel like he’s one of the biggest victims of January 6 because, as we speak, he’s still in solitary confinement and he did absolutely nothing violent on that day.”



TOP: Couy took advantage of his visit with the president to discuss western wildfires and forest management. MIDDLE: From 1998-2005, Couy performed in Paris Disney’s Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. BOTTOM: Following his Oval Office meeting, Couy watches President Trump board Marine One.

The Death of Due Process

The events of January 6 have been widely misrepresented. Couy lays out the facts: “There was not one firearm confiscated on that day. Three of the five people who passed



away died of natural causes, and the only one who died as a result of violent and willful intent was Ashli Babbitt, an unarmed Air Force veteran who was shot to death by a Capitol police officer.”

Since his arrest in January 2021, he’s been in legal limbo. It appears that the government’s case is so flimsy that many January 6 defendants are

being pressed to strike plea deals. Couy explains: “The reason the government doesn’t want to go to trial is because we can petition them for exculpatory evidence which will include all the videos from that day, and the videos are going to change the narrative from an ‘armed insurrection’ to the biggest political setup in history.”

Couy today is a free man and although his future is uncertain, he’s beaten an attempted recall campaign by his political adversaries and is making plans for new inroads. “Some folks want me to run for governor of New Mexico, but I don’t want to invest all that time and money to run for election just to have it stolen from me. The elections in New Mexico are very fraudulent.”

There is, however, one way to give the governor a run for her money without a direct head-to-head campaign. “I might go back to the small county where I’m from and run for sheriff. If the governor thinks I’ve been a burr under her blanket as a county commissioner, just wait ’til they put a badge on me.”

Politics and campaigns aside, Couy’s faith is what sustains him, and what makes his enemies fear him. He will not be cowed by slander or brutality. One Scripture above all gives him hope that the America he loves will be restored. He quotes 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Couy continues, “What we have to do is turn back to God and God will heal our nation.” ■

Marjorie Haun is a flag-waving patriot and freelance journalist who specializes in issues and policies impacting the rural West.