

County supervisor feels personally targeted after campaign signs destroyed

September 23, 2020



This is Lori Cowan's fifth political run for public office. While used to the slings and arrows of the typical campaign, Cowan said she's never been maliciously targeted until nearly 50 of her signs were stolen and destroyed Tuesday, Sept. 22.

"They signs were ripped, torn, cut up with scissors and discarded," Cowan said. "I don't know where most of them ended up. But this was intentional. Someone went out with specific intentions of targeting me."

Cowan, the incumbent for the runoff election for the Del Norte County District 2 Board of Supervisors against Valerie Starkey, said the news of the thefts quickly escalated between meetings.

"I got a phone call from a supporter who said a sign was gone. This happened in the primaries, someone messing around then, too," Cowan said. "By the time I got out of closed session, I realized this was more than one sign."

Cowan's phone was lit up with messages informing her all her signs around town had been removed and some discarded at the end of 5th Street. She said someone even got past an electric fence to access a sign on the McNamara Ranch near Pebble Beach Drive. Cowan added that the only big, vinyl signs that survived were the ones in high-traffic areas near Walmart on Washington Boulevard and Burger King on Highway 101.

"I drove around, saw the damage, and broke down and cried," Cowan said. "I like to think I'm a strong person, but this is a personal attack."

It is also against the law. Cowan said she has notified both the Crescent City Police Department and the Del Norte County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Erik Apperson warned of consequences of vandalizing or stealing campaign signs.

"We understand that politics can evoke strong emotions and election time can often intensify those emotions," Apperson wrote on the DNSO Facebook page. "That said, theft and trespassing are not political expressions. They are crimes and will be treated as such."

Apperson said his office is actively seeking information regarding these reports of criminal behavior.

"Our intent is to refer the criminal complaints to the District Attorney for formal charging," he wrote. "Del Norte County is better than this."

Apperson encourages the public to report any suspicious behavior by calling dispatch at (707) 464-4191, ext 0.

In addition, after hearing of the news, Del Norte County Clerk Alissia Northrup posted on her personal Facebook page information about Section 490.2 in the California Penal Code outlining the theft, damage or relocation of political signs without the owner's consent.

The code states anyone guilty of this misdemeanor faces jail time of up to one year or a fine of up to \$2,000.

After the news spread to her opponent, Starkey issued a statement on her campaign's Facebook page.

"We are shocked and appalled by the news that campaign signs have been stolen," Starkey wrote. "We are better than this as a community and this is unacceptable behavior. Our campaign team stands in solidarity with Lori Cowan's campaign in denouncing this behavior. We encourage our community to come together, as we always have, to allow for a civil and respectable election process."

Meanwhile, Cowan is still assessing the damage done and how many signs were involved.

"It's not hundreds, but thousands of dollars. But it's not about the money. This was not some kid. This was someone who targeted me, who maliciously went after me."

Cowan said Northwoods Realty, where she works, is offering a \$1,000 reward, and the Veritas Group of Saint Joseph's Church is pitching in another \$200, for anybody who provides information that leads to an

arrest of the vandal.

“This is the community acting like the community I know,” Cowan said. “It’s a caring community. I felt the love last night.”