



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 24, 2020

San Diego Woman Faces Charges in Lockdown Protest, Louisiana Pastor Charged With Assault

The woman in San Diego who faces a misdemeanor charge for staging a protest in violation of California's Chinese Virus lockdown order will hold another protest on Sunday, and a protesting pastor in Louisiana now faces an assault charge for, supposedly, backing a church bus too close to an anti-church protester.

The woman is Naomi Soria. The pastor is Tony Spell.



Both are fed up with the lockdown, and both say they'll fight what they claim are illegal and unconstitutional orders.

San Diego Protest

On Saturday, Soria, 27, led a 400-strong "freedom rally" at the city's Hall of Justice to protest Governor Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home quarantine.

The cops didn't toss anyone in jail, but on Tuesday they notified Soria that she faces charges and a likely \$1,000 fine, her attorneys at the Center for American Liberty said.

"The First Amendment guarantees the right to peacefully protest," [said Harmeet K. Dhillon](#), the center's CEO and a GOP activist. "Our client participated in a responsible protest adhering to social distancing guidelines. She, along with other protestors, stood six feet apart on a public sidewalk."

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"It is outrageous that our client is being charged with a crime for participating in constitutionally protected activity," he said. "The right to assemble and to petition the government does not exist if there are topics that are off limits."

"They can't stop me," [she told CBS8](#) in San Diego. "I'm exercising my God-given constitutional rights and I'm protected by all the amendments."

Mark Meuser, the attorney representing her, told the station that the state health bureaucracy had, as a practical matter, suspended the First Amendment in California. "We have these un-elected public health officials violating people's constitutional rights," he said. "Not only by making them stay home but also depriving them of their ability to even go out and petition their government."

During a conference call with Meuser and Soria, the [Times of San Diego reported](#), cops said they wanted the city attorney to approve a warrant for her arrest.

But that won't likely happen for weeks, the *Times* noted:

But a spokeswoman for City Attorney Mara Elliott said as many as 20,000 cases are referred to her office every year, and a law enforcement officer "may take weeks to prepare a case before it is referred to our office for review by attorneys."

"Case review itself can take weeks, and sometimes longer, to determine if misdemeanor charges



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will be filed,” the spokeswoman said. “Attorneys in the Criminal Division continue to review cases despite changes in their work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

[CBS8 also reported](#) that Soria expects more trouble at Sunday’s protest. “I will be arrested on Sunday for exercising my constitutional rights,” she wrote on Facebook on Wednesday in a since-deleted post.

Battling Baton Rouge

Across the country in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, cops arrested Spell, leader of the [Life Tabernacle Church](#) in Baton Rouge, for aggravated assault.

[Charged with six misdemeanors last month](#) for holding church services in violation of the state lockdown, Spell is trouble behind the wheel, too, police allege.

[Reported CNN:](#)

Police records ... indicate that Spell was driving a church bus that day and backed it up on the shoulder of a road, in the direction of a protester demonstrating in front of the church.

A witness told officers that he saw the bus continue to back up “for no apparent reason” and that it eventually slammed its brakes about five feet away from the protester, according to the arrest warrant.

Surveillance video was consistent with what the witness saw and appeared to suggest that Spell was driving the bus, the warrant stated.

Released on a \$5,000 bond, the 42-year-old defiant clergyman said he’s not guilty, [CNN reported](#).

“I am not guilty of assault with a deadly weapon,” he said. “I am not guilty of defying any orders. The only thing I am guilty of is practicing my faith, which was given to me by Jesus Christ himself.”

Spell says that attending a service is no more dangerous than shopping at the Piggly Wiggly, and that he plans to resist state orders.

“If they close every door in this city, then I will close my doors,” Spell said at the time. “But you can’t say the retailers are essential but the church is not. That is a persecution of the faith.”

“We have a mandate from the word of the Lord to assemble together,” [he told](#) CNN. “The first amendment says that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the exercise of religion.”



R. Cort Kirkwood is a long-time contributor to The New American and a former magazine editor.



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