



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 23, 2013

Rodeo Clown Banned From Missouri State Fair Over Obama Parody

Has parodying the president become a punishable offense in pockets of the United States? The Missouri State Fair has imposed a lifetime ban on a rodeo clown whose routine during a state fair rodeo included a depiction of President Obama (a second clown wearing an Obama mask) as the target of an angry bull. Additionally, the Missouri State Fair Commission has ordered that all rodeo clowns for future fairs undergo “sensitivity training” to prevent further such “unconscionable” situations.



According to news reports rodeo clown Tuffy Gessling, who provided the voice for the slapstick routine, will be disallowed from performing at the state fair ever again. “Fair officials say they’re also reviewing whether to take any action against the Missouri Rodeo Cowboy Association, the contractor responsible for [the August 10] event,” reported the Associated Press.

The routine featured the clown in the Obama mask standing like a mannequin on the rodeo ground, with Gessling asking the crowd if they wanted to see “Obama run down by a bull,” reported the AP. On a [YouTube video](#) of the incident, Gessling can be heard warning “Obama” that a runaway bull is going to “get ya, get ya, get ya!”

The incident sparked a firestorm of criticism from Missouri politicians — mostly Democrats — who condemned the action as racist and insensitive. Missouri Democratic U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill called the comedy routine “shameful” and “unacceptable,” saying that the “young Missourians who witnessed this stunt learned exactly the wrong lesson about political discourse — that somehow it’s ever acceptable to, in a public event, disrespect, taunt, and joke about harming the President of our great nation. Missouri is better than this and I expect someone to be held accountable.”

The Democratic conclave in Jackson County, Missouri, was representative of the state party’s posture over the incident, calling it “a show as ugly [as] any you could see.... Disrespecting the President is one thing; whipping a crowd into a frenzy is another. Encouraging physical harm to the President, whatever the party, is not acceptable and should not be tolerated.”

Even Republican Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder sounded off, tweeting that the State Fair “celebrates Missouri and our people. I condemn the actions disrespectful to POTUS the other night. We are better than this.”

The Missouri State Fair Commission reacted quickly to the politicized backlash, announcing in a written statement that the routine was an “unconscionable stunt” and “not in keeping with the Fair’s standards.” While not identified by state fair officials, Gessling bore the brunt of the backlash, receiving a lifetime ban from involvement in the fair.

For his part, Gessling apologized for the satire, telling Missouri news site [digitalburg.com](#) that he never intended to offend anybody. “Comedians all over the country have used political figures to make fun of



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current events — it's nothing new," Gessling said. "I never tried to be a racist or anything like that. I love all people no matter their background. I live to make people laugh."

He noted that poking fun at a sitting President has been traditional among American comics. "Making fun of political and famous people is kind of the platform," he said. "People like Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien make them all the time. I've never tried to dishonor or disrespect anyone, so the whole thing was not meant to be racist or disrespectful. I was just trying to make people laugh."

However, Jim Bainbridge, a spokesman for the the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, conceded that Gessling may have stepped over the line in how he played out the Obama gag. "It's not unheard of for a rodeo clown, depending on how he reads his audience, to play politics a little bit," Bainbridge told the AP. "But this crossed a line. Clearly, when you're suggesting that the President should be injured, it kind of gets to a level of hostility that is inappropriate."

While stopping short of punishing the Missouri Rodeo Cowboy Association, which sponsored the rodeo event, state fair officials said in a statement that they would require the group to "provide evidence to the director of the Missouri State Fair that they have proof that all officials and subcontractors of the MRCA have successfully participated in sensitivity training."

In what appears to be a politically motivated move calculated to appease hotter tempers, Mark Ficken, the president of the Missouri Rodeo Cowboy Association, stepped down from running the state group, even as his regular job as school superintendent in Boonville, Missouri, apparently hung in the balance. The Associated Press reported that an attorney for Ficken insisted his resignation from the group was "not an acknowledgment of wrongdoing on his part, but rather a protest that the association has not banned the rodeo clown from its membership."

Attorney Albert Watkins was quoted as saying that when Ficken "found out that the association had no plans to remove the rogue clown from its membership ranks, he felt that the better part of valor — given what was said — was to resign from the association."

Meanwhile, the Boonville School District announced that it had hired an investigator to find out if Ficken had been involved in any "inappropriate conduct."

Not everyone was criticizing Gessling's comedic routine, however. [Fox News](#) reported that several days after the clown was banned from the Missouri State Fair, Texas Republican Congressman Steve Stockman invited him to bring his act to the Lone Star State.

"Liberals want to bronco bust dissent," said Stockman in a statement. "But Texans value speech, even if it's speech they don't agree with. From Molly Ivins to Louie Gohmert and every opinion between, Texans value free and open political speech. I'm sure any rodeo in Texas would be proud to have performers."

Addressing the Missouri State Fair's extreme reaction to Gessling's act, Stockman said that "disagreeing with speech is one thing. Banning it and ordering citizens into re-education classes for mocking a liberal leader is another. Liberals have targeted this man for personal destruction to create a climate of fear."

Photo of clown wearing Obama mask at Missouri State Fair: AP Images



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