

Official who shot cougar violated more than law

Dan Richards likes to shoot mountain lions. The people of California have a different notion about the proper place for those magnificent creatures. In 1990, they passed Proposition 117, which banned the sport-hunting of mountain lions.

The reason was entirely straightforward. Hunting advocates had been able to wrap a fig leaf around their activities by eating what they kill. But the proponents of Prop. 117 argued that humans only kill cougars to mount them on walls and brag about it. The voters agreed, and one of the nastier impulses in human nature was curtailed.

But such restrictions don't sit well with Dan Richards. As the president of the California Fish and Game Commission, he has spent years attempting to relax restrictions regarding hunting in California. That's fine, it's a question of policy, and that's what former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger put him on the commission to resolve.

But in January, Richards decided that he didn't like being restrained by the game and fish laws of the state he serves. So he flew up to Idaho, where killing mountain lions is still legal, and prowled around the Flying B Ranch until he found a cougar, took aim and fired a fatal shot.

When word of this broke in February, animal-rights advocates were outraged. Although Richards didn't break any laws by killing the animal, he ran into a spot of legal trouble. The employees of the Flying B Ranch comped Richards the privilege of staying at that facility and using their lands to look for something to kill — an opportunity that otherwise would have cost him \$6,800.

That constituted a \$6,800 gift to a public official, which is illegal under state law.

After a brief investigation, California's Fair Political Practices Commission let Richards off the hook. Because after the story broke, Richards dipped into his wallet and reimbursed the Flying B Ranch, the

commissioners decided to merely warn him that he broke the law and that he shouldn't do it again.

So Richards is free to resume his official role crafting hunting and fishing policies for the great state of California.

Although accepting such a gift is certainly illegal, it shouldn't be grounds for much more than a fine — certainly not for a first offense. But this scandal says a great deal more about the moral character of the man we have entrusted to monitor and govern recreational hunting and fishing in our state. Richards went out of his way to slaughter a sleek, shy and distinctly beautiful creature, solely for the thrill.

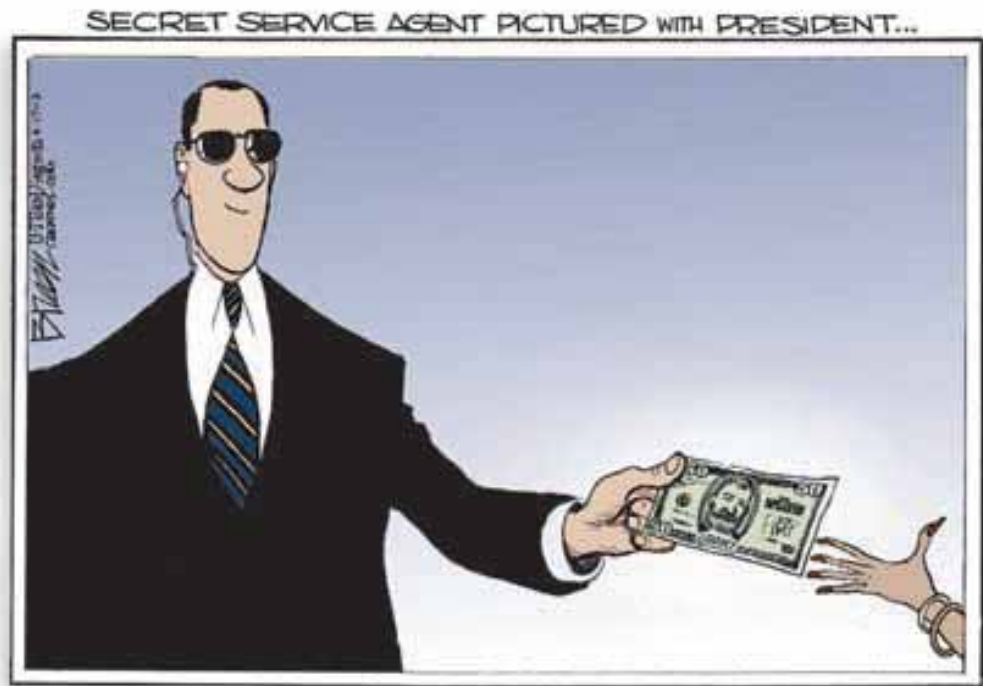
What's more, he went venue-shopping to do it. This strikes us as a particularly unpleasant type of bad faith in a public official who was appointed to uphold the laws and values of Californians.

Dan Richards is a disgrace to the very values that he should stand for. If he wants to murder cougars, he should resign from the commission and move to Idaho, where, apparently, he feels considerably more at home.



Richards

TODAY'S CARTOON By Steve Breen/The San Diego Union-Tribune



FROM READERS

High-speed rail will ease airport burden

Your excellent article on the relationship between high-speed rail and the San Francisco International Airport and the tourism business ("High-speed rail project has hopes soaring at SFO," Tuesday) highlights an aspect of the high-speed rail discussion that often gets neglected — the role of intrastate air service and its increasing burden on the state's airports.

High-speed rail will substitute for not only Los Angeles-to-SFO service, but will also provide good transportation links to the economically depressed cities in the Central Valley. There is really no alternative since expansion of SFO seems out of the question unless the high-speed rail opponents in Burlingame are willing to give a portion of their downtown for a new airport runway.

It is important to note that the state's airports and air transport industry support high-speed rail.

James W. Haas
San Francisco

Fees curb half-staff excess

While the high cost involved in lowering city flags to half-staff is certainly galling and an indication of the folly of unions ("Lowering flags raises big bill, activists told," Tuesday), I do see one benefit in the passing on of those costs in the form of high fees: It will prevent every special interest from requesting a flag-lowering that demands it.

The devaluing of flag-lowering to memorialize something has been going on for years to the point that

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the truly deserving tragedies of historical and cultural importance to the nation and region are cheapened. No one should see flags at half-staff and wonder why, yet that is how many feel when they see one.

At least with these higher fees, the frivolous half-staff requests might be deterred so that we can return to a time when a half-staff flag signified a truly important time for community mourning.

Marc Schoenfeld
San Francisco

Muni delays impact S.F.

I live near Sanchez Street and Duboce Avenue, but I did not vote for Scott Wiener in the last

supervisory race. One of the main reasons is that I did not think he would be very responsive to his constituency. It seems I was correct.

In February, I experienced delays while riding the KT-Ingleside-Third Street train to the extent that it was totally stopped close to or blocks away from West Portal. All three times, I exited and walked to Taraval Street, where I caught the 48-Quintara to 24th Street and Castro Street and the 24-Divisadero home. After the third time, I went to Wiener's office at City Hall and filled out a meeting request form.

The meeting request was to ask why Muni is unable to run an effective, reliable schedule. It breaks down far more often than it should. Part of that is a lack of funding, I understand. Well, with this lack of funding existing, why is the Van Ness Avenue corridor being pursued? All those monies can be used to help Muni run more efficiently, rather than add something more to screw up.

So far, there has been no response to my request for a meeting, and I am left believing that Wiener is, as I suspected before the elections last year, not responsive to voters.

Mike Burkett
San Francisco

Secret Service gone wild

The Secret Service prostitution scandal in Colombia clearly shows that discipline and control within the agency have severely broken down. The agency is badly in need of being revamped, from top on down, as it seems to be too lax and very poorly managed.

Kenneth L. Zimmerman
Huntington Beach

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