

# MOSCOW REPORT

Press Release by N. D. Wilson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **IDAHO AUTHOR FACES JAIL TIME ON FARCICAL CHARGE**

MOSCOW, ID – The normally sleepy college town in northern Idaho has long been known as a blue dot in a very red state, a place where red and blue voters—farmers and loggers and university professors—have lived side by side for years with minimal friction. Those peaceful days may now be gone, just one more casualty of the 2020s.

In the summer running up to the presidential election, Moscow’s liberal controlled city council granted and expanded emergency powers for the mayor in response to Covid-19—eventually imposing a mask mandate that has now been repeatedly extended. Many citizens in the low-risk county were unhappy that the council did not define the limits of the “emergency” or explain what would end it. They were unhappier when the council used city funds to run an ad in the local paper, calling on citizens to report their neighbors, threatening jail time and fines for offenders, and publishing the police department’s non-emergency number as a “snitch line”. When citizens began the legal process of petitioning for a democratic referendum on the emergency order—which would allow residents to uphold or overturn the emergency order by a simple vote, city staff declined to allow the process to proceed, withholding the forms normally used to collect such signatures.

Enter Rory Wilson (18), valedictorian of his 2020 graduating class, and a former member of Moscow’s Mayoral Youth Council. Rory had decided to stay close to home in Moscow on a “pandemic gap year” taking classes at New St. Andrews College before deciding what to do next fall. Wilson is quick to express his fondness for the mayor personally, but he was one of many locals disappointed in the “draconian” enforcement of the mask mandate. When officers stopped Rory on the sidewalk outside of a Hebrew class in the early fall and threatened him with jail time for standing too close to his cousin, Rory’s concerns became more personal.

When an extension of the mask mandate was brought to the council, Rory was one of the many citizens who waited in line for hours to beg the council to allow the order—and its criminal enforcement—to expire.

“At the very least,” Rory said. “They could have set clear limits on what they meant by ‘emergency’. As it is, the order will keep being extended for as long as the council members are frightened. And that could be forever. There is no objectivity to it, at all.”

Mayor Bill Lambert promised to have someone look into what an emergency was. That was the only concession.

“In that council meeting,” Rory said. “It became obvious that there was literally not a single thing we could have done or said to change their minds. They were settled on extending the order already and nothing was going to change that.”

Shortly thereafter, a protest was organized for City Hall. Hundreds of protestors gathered in the parking lot for a short and legal religious service—one prayer was followed by the singing of three psalms and the Christian doxology. Rory was in attendance when officers arrived and, allegedly on direct orders from Mayor Lambert, illegally arrested three participants, leading them away from the singing crowd in handcuffs. One of the arrested individuals was Gabriel Rensch, then a Republican candidate for county commissioner who had been a loud opponent of the mask mandate.

“It was an entirely peaceful and lawful protest, and the escalation to arrests was outrageous,” Rory said. “I’m only eighteen, so I haven’t seen much, but one year ago, I never would have guessed that I would live to see Americans being arrested while worshipping in public, let alone in my own hometown before I even managed to get off to college.”

Footage of the arrests made quite a stir on national news. Red state America joined in the outrage.

Gabriel Rensch’s brother, Aaron Rensch felt the same about the arrests. Aaron Rensch is a literary agent as well as a TV and film producer, a Texas transplant who has lived in Moscow, Idaho for twenty years.

“Those arrests really pushed me over the brink,” Rensch said. “Watching my brother being cuffed at a psalm sing was rough. It’s still hard for me to comprehend that our local police department would do something so clearly unconstitutional and illegal, no matter how much the city council wanted them to.”

Aaron Rensch’s business partner is N.D. Wilson, a local author. Born and raised in Moscow, Wilson is now a successful TV producer and an acclaimed author with novels published in more than twenty languages. Together, Rensch and Wilson have run their production operations out of Idaho. N.D. Wilson also happens to be Rory Wilson’s father.

“For years, I passed on opportunities to move to NYC or LA,” Wilson said. “I love Moscow, and I wanted to raise my kids here, not in Manhattan or Malibu. I’m from the Palouse. This landscape is in my bones. And then all this starts happening. My son is threatened with jail time for chatting with his cousin. My business partner’s brother gets arrested at a psalm sing. Aaron and I both felt the need to do something. We talked about using our resources to sue the city, but we settled on something more low-key. Funnier. Our company, Gorilla Poet Productions, produced protest stickers instead.”

Six hundred and fifty stickers to be precise—circular, vinyl so they don’t deteriorate in weather, non-damaging, all centered around a hammer and sickle. A few of the stickers simply read: “Soviet Moscow.” Most of the stickers echo the city’s official mask mandate slogan: “Soviet Moscow – Enforced Because We Care.”

“Credit where credit is due, I think both Laura Ingraham and Tucker Carlson made the Soviet Moscow crack when talking about my brother’s arrest,” Aaron Rench said. “It seemed like the right characterization for how jackbooted the city council and the MPD had started being. So, we went with it.”

“I used a few of the stickers myself,” Wilson said. “On coffee mugs. My truck. That kind of thing. We gave a bunch to friends. Some to local business owners who were struggling under the order. I don’t even know how many we gave away. Most went on bumpers. I really had no idea how upsetting they would be to the city attorneys, Liz Warner and Mia Bautista. But hey, no one ever said the 2020s would be the age of reason.”

The fireworks came when the stickers appeared on city poles.

“So, I wake up in the middle of the night to a call from an officer,” Wilson said. “Officer Waters. And he asks me to come get my sons off a street corner—Rory and his little brother, who is fourteen. Waters was very serious, like something enormous has happened. I was relieved when he told me my boys were okay. They were only a couple blocks from my house, so I got there quick. And the first thing Officer Waters says when telling me that my sons were putting these protest stickers up, is that he does not agree with the messaging. I told him that I supported and understood the messaging. After that, he refused to allow me to approach my minor son, where he was being interrogated on the hood of a cop car. I tried to keep things friendly, to diffuse the crackle in the air, but the atmosphere remained pretty strained. I was proud of my boys. It is important to stand up against men who begin to abuse power, even when that abuse is small, and especially when those men are carrying badges and guns. If government overreach and illegal arrests do not merit peaceful protest, I don’t know what does. And whatever protesting my sons did that night, they did it peacefully. No burning cars. No looting or vandalism or destruction of property. Just the political courage to stand up for what they believed. On top of that, my sons have been proven right. Those psalm sing arrests were illegal, a total city boondoggle, and Liz Warner and Mia Bautista had to drop all those charges. Even if I found out that my sons had done something illegal that night, which, now that I’m fully familiar with the city ordinances in play, I truly do not believe they did, their offense would pale in comparison to the offense of armed officers illegally and unconstitutionally arresting worshippers at a psalm sing. Like jay-walking versus beating a confession out of someone. Not even in the same universe.”

At first, Wilson did not realize the severity of what his sons had gone through that night when officers had stopped them.

“It wasn’t until I got my boys home that I learned that two officers had actually handcuffed Rory and put him down on the concrete to interrogate him. And no, they didn’t read him his rights. They also took my minor son away from his handcuffed brother, lied to him about the law and his rights, and interrogated him alone. If I had known all that when I had arrived on the scene, I would have been pretty irate...not calm and sleepy.”

That night, both boys were sent home without citations. Days later, Liz Warner notified MPD that she wanted charges brought.

“Liz and Mia saw red, I guess,” Wilson said. “Some cops had to real-quick write up some belated police reports. I don’t think anyone at MPD thought prosecutions would be coming.”

City Attorney, Liz Warner, has charged Rory Wilson with thirteen counts of posting signs or fliers on poles without permission—thirteen misdemeanors. Latah County is charging the juvenile with the same, and the City of Moscow has decided to prosecute her local bestselling author for good measure.

“I guess they want me on misdemeanor conspiracy to commit sticker or something like that,” Wilson said. “Every misdemeanor count carries a max of up to six months in prison. That won’t happen, but no joke, right? Except this is all joke, a joke worthy of Leslie Knope in an episode of *Parks and Recreation*. And one of the strongest sitcom moments came when Officer Waters delivered our summons. He told us that this is the crime most often committed by people posting yard sale signs and lost cat posters.”

When Wilson asked Waters if MPD normally handcuffed little, old ladies to interrogate them about their lost cats, Officer Waters was quick to reply.

“I had nothing to do with that,” Officer Waters said.

“Yeah, well he was the officer in charge on the scene,” Wilson said. “So, nice try.”

The Wilsons have contracted Sam Creason, a lawyer in the region with a love for constitutional cases.

“It has been extremely disappointing to watch local government charge these two boys with a criminal offense,” Creason said. “From what I have seen, the young men have impeccable reputations for leadership and respect amongst people who personally know them. While some may not like *what* was posted, or *how* it was posted, the constitutional right to free speech prohibits the government from using ambiguous and unused ordinances to punish opposition. We are confident that the appropriate court will dismiss the charges based upon both the law and the facts in this case. Hopefully, we can reach that result without too much more heartache or attention.”

In response to a subpoena from Creason, initially contested by Liz Warner, the city of Moscow has been forced to turn over all records related to the “no posting” ordinance.

“In the history of this ordinance,” Wilson said. “How many prosecutions or even citations do you think there have ever been in this town for posting a flier or sticker on a pole? I’ll give you a hint. It rhymes with zero. Notta. Also zilch. In the same time frame, only God knows how many thousands of yard sale signs and lost pet fliers have been posted—all with addresses or phone numbers making them real tough cases to crack.”

When Officer Waters delivered news of the prosecution to the Wilson residence, he denied that it was politically motivated.

“This isn’t political,” Waters told the Wilsons. “We just have to enforce the law equally.”

“Maybe it was opposite day,” Wilson said. “I’m pretty sure ‘equally’ doesn’t mean ‘we’ve never done this to anyone ever before, but we disagree with your messaging, so here come the handcuffs just for you guys.’”

“You know, just prior to this incident,” Wilson added. “The city was actually looking into partnering with me to help them with PR for their mask mandate. How funny is that? Surprise. They

decided to prosecute me instead, forming more of an involuntary partnership. I guess I should take this opportunity to go ahead and share my PR hot tips: If people are feeling unheard and have begun protesting because they think you are acting like little soviets, don't try to prove them wrong by acting like little soviets! Put away the handcuffs! Don't arrest kids without mirandizing them or lie or interrogate minors alone! Don't fudge police reports or magically disappear all audio and video recordings of encounters. Understand and empathize with all your constituents the way you would like them to try to understand and empathize with you. All for now. Expect a bill later."

Wilson is still distributing his company's stickers, while waiting for progress on his case.

"I'm happy to be the one to fight the city on all this. I hope it helps keep the focus on the emotional and subjective way the council is still dropping the hammer—and the sickle--on their own people and on local businesses. Government and government employees at every level, regardless of political party, must be held accountable by citizens or the relationship becomes abusive. If being a good citizen means I have to butt heads with city attorneys, then so be it. I'm traveling less these days. I've got the time!"

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