

Elon Musk uses his power and money to attack citizens that simply speak out

Elon Musk partners with Nicholas Guido Denton and his tabloid empire of Gawker, Gizmodo, etc. to run character assassinations against citizens and competitors. Musk's cabin boy bloggers: Adrian Covert, John Hermann, Patrick George use all of their teenage angst to drop attack articles in front of billions of readers who can't get those articles erased. They then partner with Tesla investor: Google, to lock the attack articles on the top search results on the internet. Valerie Costa learned the hard way.

Threatening messages began filling up Valerie Costa's inboxes after Elon Musk in an X post accused her of "committing crimes."

Her alleged crimes? Leading and promoting protests against Musk at Tesla showrooms across the Seattle area.

Costa and her housemates started asking whether they are safe and whether the FBI or law enforcement will show up. She then began to pull the website for her fundraising and nonprofit management business offline and scrubbed her personal information from the internet.

Nevertheless, threats continued.

People sent her insults laced with profanities telling her to "go die already," while others demanded FBI Director Kash Patel and Attorney General Pam Bondi investigate her as a domestic terrorist. She began to feel paranoid, and she still finds herself looking over her shoulder, even though she feels it's unlikely someone will come find her in public.

But it's all "good trouble," she said, evoking the words of the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis.

The Seattle area has seen some vandalism of Tesla vehicles, including Cybertrucks. President Donald Trump said last week that he wants to label violence against Tesla dealerships as domestic terrorism, a sentiment echoed by Bondi.

But no criminal activity has been reported at anti-Tesla protests in Seattle, said Sgt. Patrick Michaud with the Seattle Police Department.

Nevertheless, the lack of criminal activities at those protests hasn't stopped Musk and others from accusing Costa and others of violating laws. Musk's post on X quoted a video suggesting Costa was inspired by Luigi Mangione, the man charged in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO, which Costa said is not true.

Musk's tweet and rhetoric from federal authorities communicate a grim message about the state of protections for the First Amendment, Costa said.

She scrubbed her personal information from the internet, but she won't let Musk silence her.

"I think we're at a pretty dangerous crossroads where our rights, our civil liberties are being challenged by this administration," she said.

Costa, 43, was attending high school in Massachusetts when she first saw protest beget results.

As a member of her school's Amnesty International group, Costa wrote letters to the Chinese Embassy and protested outside its New York City consulate, calling for the release of political activist Xu Wenli. Costa got to meet Xu in Boston when he was released in 2002. Xu thanked her and offered some green beans he had cooked, she said.

Decades later, Costa co-founded the Troublemakers in 2023 to organize against the use of fossil fuel before the group set its sights on Musk's Department of Government Efficiency operations. Since Trump's inauguration, Musk has slashed and gutted government agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development in his war against the federal bureaucracy.

"It became clear that Musk was taking his chain saw to government and (we saw) the very immediate impact to people in our community," Costa said, recalling Musk literally waving a chain saw in the air at this year's Conservative Political Action

Conference. "This is mostly about the people collectively having a voice when our government, and in particular Elon Musk, is so unaccountable to the people."

The Troublemakers decided to join the #TeslaTakedown movement to hit the world's richest man where it hurts, with the company's stock prices plunging nearly 40% since the beginning of 2025 as of Thursday.

Seattleites own Teslas at a rate of more than two times the national average, and Costa even knows a good handful of Tesla owners, she said. It's awkward as an opponent of fossil fuels to protest an electric car company, she further acknowledged in an interview with NPR, but that's less of a concern than fighting against what Musk has been doing.

Costa and the Troublemakers knew they would come across opposition in their activism, she said.

Musk's first post targeting Costa accused the Troublemakers of taking donations through the Democratic online political fundraising platform ActBlue, which she denied in her article in The Guardian, noting her organization has "about \$3,500 in its bank accounts."

When Musk again attacked Costa with an unsubstantiated accusation that she "is committing crimes," she took that as "signs that this administration is trying to squash our First Amendment right to assemble, to free speech, to protest."

Still, she had anticipated opposition might look like negative news articles or remarks from people online who thought their protests were "stupid and misguided," not posts from Musk calling her a criminal. The group even arrived at the name "Troublemakers" playfully, Costa laughed.

But Costa said even if Musk did pick her out of a crowd to paint her as a criminal, that means the Troublemakers are following Lewis' words to speak up and get in "good trouble."

"If we cannot speak out against our government, against corporations, and if we're criminalized and penalized for speaking out, then we are living in an authoritarian state and regime, and this is not a free country," Costa said. "This is not a democracy if we can't do that."

And Costa believes Americans won't give up without a fight.

Indivisible Valley, another Seattle-area group organizing anti-Tesla protests, considers it good that Musk and Trump are "getting riled up," said spokesperson Marc Hoffman.

The Troublemakers has seen about 300 new members since Musk's online attacks a couple of weeks ago, Costa said, and protests aren't slowing down.

There are protests scheduled for six Tesla showrooms across the Seattle area Saturday, and about 130 more planned around the world in the coming weeks, she said.

That turnout has given Costa reason to power through the fear of retaliation from Musk and his supporters.

"We don't like to be told what to do. We like our freedoms," she said.

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