

Honorable Council Members,

My name is Desmond Cadogan. I have been a PETA volunteer since the 1990s and have participated in many anti-fur protests here in New York. As a gay black man, I am also a longtime advocate of both gay and civil rights. I was surprised when I heard that a preacher planned to protest this bill because some black women like to wear fur coats to church. This bill doesn't preclude anyone from wearing fur. Also, I follow Black Lives Matter and the NAACP, and I have never seen the right to buy a new fur coat on any civil rights agenda. I saw the flier that Rev. Green posted, urging his followers to get on a bus to City Hall for what he called a free field trip, a free lunch, and the chance to win a \$250 American Express card—with no mention whatsoever of the fur issue.

As someone who volunteers for causes free of charge, I came to City Hall that day to meet this group and ask questions. I have the utmost respect for views other than my own and looked forward to having an exchange of ideas. But the group was stage-managed, and neither I nor a reporter was allowed to talk to anyone other than an appointed spokesperson. When the group got off the buses, they were handed homemade protest signs by white pro-fur lobbyists. It looked shady, and it saddened me. Whether money changed hands to stage this stunt, God only knows. There are so many serious civil rights issues that it's demeaning for the African-American community to be used as a smokescreen by the predominantly white fur trade because it can't address the issue at hand: needless, gruesome cruelty to animals. The fur trade attempted to inject the race issue last month at a hearing for a bill to ban fur sales in California. Chris Holden, an African-American assembly member from Pasadena said that he found such attempts insulting. In pledging his support for the bill, he said, "To suggest that there's a cultural connection to this issue trivializes the point, and it focuses on a divisive issue that is not accepted by me. ... [A]nd it doesn't sell with African-Americans that I know."

In closing, I'd like to point out that black icons like Oprah Winfrey, Taraji P. Henson, and Wendy Williams have stated publicly that they stopped wearing real fur and switched to fake in order to stop animals from suffering for human vanity. Last year Oprah listed faux fur as one of her "favorite things." Wendy Williams launched her own line of fake fur coats. Taraji P. Henson had producers of *Empire* replace the real fur that her character wears with fake fur, and nobody could tell the difference. And I was very happy to read that in a new poll, 75% of New Yorkers want fur sales banned and the figure is slightly higher among African-Americans (specifically, 77%). To suggest that our community has not progressed on this issue as other communities have is offensive. As you decide whether to support this bill, I respectfully ask that you consider not just what advocates on both sides have to say but also their motivation for saying it.

Thank you.