

# [***Exclusive: Joe Exotic Speaks Out Over Presidential Bid***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1W-62D1-DY68-10KY-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Tom Norton

**Highlight:** Newsweek spoke to the "Tiger King," who is serving a 21-year prison sentence, about his presidential campaign.

**Body**

"Tiger King" Joe Exotic has denied reports that he has dropped out of the 2024 presidential race, despite recent campaign documents suggesting otherwise.

Exotic, whose real name is Joseph Allen Maldonado, shot to fame in 2020 as the star of the [*Netflix*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/netflix?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) docuseries *Tiger King* and [*announced his campaign*](https://www.newsweek.com/tiger-king-joe-exotic-announces-2024-presidential-run-1788103?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on social media in March 2023. He is serving a 21-year prison sentence following his conviction in 2019 on multiple charges, including two counts of hiring hitmen to murder the [*wildlife activist Carole Baskin*](https://www.newsweek.com/carole-baskin-tiger-unwraps-christmas-presents-1769240?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). He was also convicted of killing tigers and selling them across state lines.

Earlier this month, news began to circulate that Exotic's campaign appeared to have been quietly dropped, after a Federal Election Commission termination report was uncovered.

However, Exotic told *Newsweek* via a voice message sent from FMC Fort Worth prison that his campaign was "far from over" and blamed his team for the FEC submission.

Exotic's campaign website said he wanted to "give a voice back to the people" and believed that "if you own your own property and pay taxes on it, the government should not have a right to tell you what you can do on that property."

The news site Raw Story found a termination report submitted by Exotic's campaign committee, Joseph Maldonado to Free America, that said it had less than $1,400 left, having fundraised just over $16,000.

A termination report indicates that a campaign for federal office is no longer receiving significant contributions or making significant expenditures. All candidates must register with the FEC once they receive contributions or expenditures of more than $5,000.

"My campaign is very far from over," Exotic said, adding, "The problem of being in prison is you get all these people out in the world that want to help long enough to make a name for themselves, and then they want to quit."

He continued: "And the problem was with my treasurer. She's running her own campaign now—running for city office now that she has a name for herself thanks to me. And she quit as treasurer, and she filled out the wrong form and completely canceled my committee. But I have people on the outside right now working on fixing that with the FEC.

"So, no, my campaign is far from over. [It's the] same problem that I have with lawyers. It seems every lawyer I've paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to gets a job on court television and then forgets about Joe being in prison.

"But, yeah, no, I'm running for 2024. I'm not giving up. Right now I'm the "no" vote, and the "no" vote is pretty strong because people are sick of ***politics*** right now."

Exotic previously said the "no" vote meant his candidacy provided an alternative to not voting.

"And people are sick and tired of the corruption in D.C. So rather just not go vote, they're gonna take a stand and write 'Joe Exotic' on their ballot," he told Wear [*ABC*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/abc?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) 3 in April.

Since the termination report, no further entries from Exotic's campaign committee have been published on the FEC's website.

A spokesperson for the FEC told *Newsweek* that it had approved the Joseph Maldonado to Free America committee termination on May 6, adding, "Any additional correspondence between the committee and the FEC will be posted on the filings page."

*Newsweek* has contacted John M. Pierce, a legal representative that Exotic says he has retained, and Thomas Wolf CPA, whom Exotic has listed as his running mate, for comment via email.

The only name on the termination report besides Exotic's is Tamara Springer, who is listed as treasurer.

Springer has previously spoken about her professional involvement with the "Tiger King." In a 2022 interview with the *South Bend Tribune*, Springer was described as his executive assistant, power of attorney and website store manager.

She is now campaigning to join the St. Joseph County Council Committee for District I, in South Bend, Indiana. *Newsweek* has contacted Springer via a contact form on her campaign website for comment about the allegations made by Exotic.

Exotic originally announced that he would be running for president as a Libertarian, but a few weeks later, he [*switched*](https://twitter.com/joe_exotic/status/1645868817459888128) to the [*Democratic Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democratic-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

"Im joining the [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to fight like hell for every child in America. It's time for a goddamn revolution, and I'm leading the charge!" Exotic wrote on X, formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), in April 2023.

His campaign website said he was "passionate about criminal justice reform" and believed "[p]oliticians and lobbyists have too much control over everyone's lives and rights."

Although Exotic [*remains behind bars*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-exotic-sends-message-donald-trump-kamala-harris-joe-biden-1901417?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), there is no legal barrier to a person running for president from prison. During the 1920 presidential election, Socialist Eugene V. Debs ran while imprisoned and won more than 900,000 votes, but no Electoral College votes.

Exotic said in his 2023 announcement, "I am here because I have a world platform to make these politicians listen to your and my concerns and give us some answers for once because all they do is lie to all of us, take our hard earned money calling it taxes, and give it away to foreign countries without them giving us anything back."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2209691/joe-exotic-tiger-king.jpg)

**Graphic**

Joe Exotic The Tiger King

Netflix

Joe Exotic from Netflix's Tiger King

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