

Protesters clash with occupiers at refuge

BURNS (AP) — The armed activists occupying a national wildlife refuge in southeastern Oregon clashed with environmentalists Saturday as a standoff stretched into a 15th day.

A shouting match erupted as members of the Center for Biological Diversity, a national nonprofit conservation group, tried to speak at a news briefing, *The Oregonian* reported. As the center's Executive Director Kieran Suckling began speaking, the armed activists screamed and booed him.

"We're here to speak up for public land, which belongs to the public," Suckling said over the yelling. "These people are trying to take the land away."

The armed group took over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge to protest federal land use policies. Authorities have not tried to remove the group.

The shouting match happened just after occupiers arrived for the briefing carrying a basket of security cameras they said they had removed at the request of residents, the newspaper reported.

"This in my opinion is unreasonable search," said LaVoyce Sinicum, referencing the Fourth Amendment. He invited the FBI to pick up the cameras, which he claimed it had installed.



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

Losing the war

Sean Penn's foray into Mexico to interview Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman has stirred up some dormant thoughts about the drug war, and our involvement in it. I have no idea what Penn was trying to accomplish, but if it led to Shorty getting the bracelets (again), I'm glad Penn was enough of a stooge to pursue the interview. And Mr. Penn might want to think about that for a while — that is, which side of the drug war actually used him.

The world of narcotics trafficking and enforcement exists firmly in the darker shades of gray.

I have kicked a lot of doors. I have run dozens of informants, either paid mercenaries or stupid amateurs working off a case. I have held a dying drug dealer, shot four times in the chest, in my arms when he gurgled his last breath. I have followed loads of dope by helicopter and airplane, planted trackers on cars in the middle of the night, and I've stood in a tweaker's kitchen watching an infant crawl across the floor, climb

up my leg, and hand me a bag full of meth. I have been the canary lowered into the mine.

I offer that only as a way to ensure you of my bona fides, and perhaps earn your ear when I tell you that we are losing the war on drugs. It isn't a matter of tactics, but an absence of long-term strategy. It is a grossly expensive war, returning little on the investment, and so we must change up as adeptly as the cartels — who control distribution from Chiapas to Redmond and beyond, and who have an endless supply of mopes willing to risk it all to sell to your kids, your brother, or your mom.

I don't claim to have all of the answers. I can only tell you what I have experienced deep inside the mine, and hope that somehow we can arrive at a better strategy. It must begin with education. We must educate, inform, and win the minds of those who would be users. And we better be good at it, because I have slapped the cuffs on too many DARE graduates.

I am not calling for the collective legalization of meth, heroin, cocaine, or any of the designer drugs. The destruction they have caused, like a giant cyanide spill, demands meaningful laws and their enforcement.

The only way to beat Shorty is by killing his market.

The proponents of marijuana are often disingenuous

in one respect: they seem to believe they are above the discussion. That's obtuse at best, and chooses to ignore the larger realities surrounding the trafficking of pot on the grand scale.

If it's smuggled Mexican weed, they have no idea how many heads have been rolled across a dance floor in a Culiacan disco in order to get that weed into their pipe. If it's domestic or Canadian weed, they don't have any idea who the grower might be paying taxes to — think outlaw motorcycle gangs, or the Mexican Mafia — or how many acres of National Forest have been polluted into a superfund site.

Farm to bong would be fantastic if only it wasn't largely a rationalization. The weed trade isn't magically free of the dangerous and unsavory.

Still, we should legalize it at the federal level, pushing it firmly into the world of regulation and heavy taxation. Use the windfall to pay teachers something more than pennies, fill potholes, or fund field trips for kids to the High Desert Museum.

I went into the job as a true believer in smashing the dope trade, and anyone involved in it. I came out of that long, dark tunnel covered with physical and emotional scars and believing firmly that there must be a better strategy. I have spent millions of your dollars on lengthy investigations, put a lot of dope on the table,

arrested dozens of people, only to see all of it replaced in minutes, and to watch as cartel lawyers fought every aspect of the case — not because they cared about the mopes who got arrested — but because they cared about what they would learn in the discovery process. And nothing, at the street level, changed.

The price for a pound of meth or a piece of heroin today is less than it was five years ago, and that should tell you something.

In the world of narcotics, nothing is what it seems — except the permanent damage done to the people who choose to use them, to their families and friends, and to their communities by the people who sell them. There is no mirage in that respect; it's exactly what it looks like. Dig deep enough into murders, child abuse, kidnapping, extortion, and almost every petty street crime, and you are likely to find a nexus to dope.

It's the most selfish world imaginable, and it reminds me again of that dealer who died in my arms, full of bullets and choking on his own blood in an empty parking lot, and years later, in court, when his mother approached me, crying and holding his portrait against her chest.

"Did he ask for me when he died?" she said. And all I could do was reach out, hug her tightly, and quietly tell her the truth: "No ma'am, I'm sorry, he didn't."

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