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Wasco clerk rejects new voters

THE DALLES (AP) — Officials announced Wednesday that all new voter registration applications will be rejected in Wasco County, where a voting war is building between disciples of Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and a group of Oregonians who plan to move to the county temporarily.

"Because I have reason to believe there are organized efforts to fraudulently register people to vote in the November general election, I have decided to impose a blanket rejection," County Clerk Sue Proffitt told a group of "street people" from Rajneeshpuram who had come to the courthouse to register.

The rejections, effective from Wednesday until Nov. 6, automatically will trigger appeals, and each applicant would be notified of the time and location of his hearing, she added.

Proffitt said she made the move in response to statements by both Rajneeshes and an Albany-based anti-Rajneesh group that has planned to move to the county temporarily in an effort to prevent the Rajneeshes from "taking over" the county in the general election.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Norma Paulus announced that she will detail the state's plans to handle the Rajneesh controversy at a news conference Friday in Salem.

Paulus also said that attendance at the news conference will be open to everyone except Ma Anand Sheela, the fiery Rajneesh who's the personal secretary to the guru.

"I have a contract with the people of this state, but that contract does not contain a clause requiring me to subject myself to shouting, screaming or vile, obscene epithets," Mrs. Paulus said. "For that reason, Sheela is not invited or welcome."

Joann Boies of Albany, a spokeswoman for the anti-Rajneesh group, said Proffitt's voter registration cutoff plan might help ensure that the Rajneeshes won't unfairly sway the election.

"I think that's one fair way of seeing that the vote is doing what it should do," she said. "We're hoping we don't have to go at all" to vote in Wasco County.

"This is exactly the kind of thing that is going to start a riot," Rajneesh spokeswoman Ma Prem Isabel said of the new policy. She attributed the action to bigotry.

"It's very un-American and very unpatriotic. It's a putdown for all these people. I'd like to say that I think this is an insult to every American," said Ma Deva Jayamala, who accompanied the street people to The Dalles.

The street people met with reporters and sang "God Bless America" before leaving. "They said the next time they came back they would have 3,000" people, said Karen LeBreton, chief deputy county clerk.

Ma Prem Isabel said some of the street people insisted on registering to vote in The Dalles

rather than in the Rajneeshpuram precinct after seeing televised reports of the furor their presence has provoked.

About 2,300 street people remain in the sect's central Oregon commune-city of Rajneeshpuram, where 3,000 were brought from around the country under the Share-A-Home program.

Rajneeshes have denied the program was designed to increase their voting power, but announced this week that two unnamed disciples would be write-in candidates for county commissioner. The sheriff's and district attorney's positions also are on the Nov. 6 ballot.

"What has gone on this morning in contesting this registrations was not just aimed at Rajneesh. It was just to keep the voting here in Wasco County clean," said County Judge Bill Hulse. "...The ones that are legal voters will be able to vote; the ones that are not shouldn't be registering anyway."

Deputy Secretary of State Greg McMurdo said the secretary of state's office had advised Proffitt to take the action.

"What we told her is that if she believes that persons were attempting to register who were not qualified, that she under state law has authority to reject registrations," McMurdo said.

To be eligible to vote in Oregon, people must be residents of the state for at least 20 days before the election, be residents of the county in which they plan to vote, be U.S. citizens and be over 18, he said.

Homeless find no nest at Rajneeshpuram

PORTLAND (AP) — An advocate for Portland's homeless says up to 100 homeless people have been stranded in the city by followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in recent weeks.

Michael Stoops, chairman of the Burnside Community Council, said he and Portland City Council candidate William McCormick are proposing an emergency travel fund to help the people return to the cities from which they came.

The Rajneeshes say some 2,300 or more street people from across the country are now visiting Rajneeshpuram, the religious sect's city-commune

in central Oregon. Originally, the Rajneeshes offered to pay to bus the visitors to any U.S. city if they chose to leave Rajneeshpuram, but that offer has not been made for people who have arrived since Sept. 23.

Stoops estimated that it would cost \$125 per person to send the homeless people back to the cities they came from.

On Tuesday, about eight street people who were recruited to live at Rajneeshpuram picketed a downtown Portland hotel owned by the Rajneeshes, saying the group went back on its promise to provide them return bus tickets.

Stoops, an advocate of rights for the homeless, said Tuesday that a benefit ball will be held Oct. 21 to raise money for the travel fund. He said he also is seeking city, county, and state funds for the project.

Stoops said he has talked to about 50 of the people who have left Rajneeshpuram.

"Even the dumping of 35 people in a city the size of Portland causes major problems because there is not enough emergency shelter in the city," Stoops said. "What is 1,000 were dumped out. That would be a disaster."

He said he is considering legal action against the Rajneeshes to regain the money used to send the people back home. Those stranded often are "dumped" in the middle of the night in various locations, he said.

"It's a planned way to get rid of them," Stoops said.

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