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Militia leader says Freemen should surrender to face established courts

■ **SOVEREIGNTY:** Some key figures in the militia movement hope to avoid another Waco incident

JORDAN, Mont. (AP) — The Freemen, holed up on an isolated farm where they claim to have their own legal system, should surrender and face an established court, a leader of another militant group said Sunday.

Others urged that outsiders stay away and not get involved in the standoff between federal authorities and the Freemen, barricaded on a wheat farm on the snow-covered prairie of east-central Montana.

More than 100 FBI agents have been keeping watch on the Freemen's compound, 30 miles outside Jordan, since two leaders of the group were arrested on March 25.

A third member of the group surrendered Saturday. Authorities won't say how many people are still at the farm, but 14 of them are believed to be wanted on various state and federal charges.

Neighbors said the Freemen have built bunkers and openly stockpiled food, fuel and weapons — possibly including military armaments.

FBI agents have twice stopped a pair of sympathizers trying to reach the farm.

"Stay home, and let the negotiators and the people on the site handle this problem, so we don't have a Waco or a Ruby Ridge," John Parsons of the Tri-State Militia of South Dakota said Sunday.

"The key thing here is that we need a peaceful solution to this problem. They need to come out and face their forum in a court of law and state their problems in a court of law under a system that is just," Parsons said on ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley*.

The Freemen deny the legitimacy of the government. Members call their compound, a cluster of houses and other buildings on a 960-acre wheat farm, "Justus Township" and insist they have their own laws and their own courts.

The Washington Post reported Sunday that the FBI was considering an offer from white separatist Randy Weaver, whose wife and son were killed by federal agents in 1992 in a shootout at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, to mediate an end to the standoff.

Weaver and outside militia groups should stay home and let officials here try to resolve the situation peacefully, said Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.

People like Weaver tend to create division and "probably are going to create more problems than they are going to solve," Baucus said on CBS's *Face the Nation*.

"If anyone from another state wishes to come visit Montana, they'd better do it without their guns," John Trochmann, founder of the Militia of Montana, said on ABC. "We don't need help from other states. We would like to see a peaceful settlement to this."

A more militant militia leader, Norman Olson of the Michigan Militia, said on *Face the Nation* that he plans to come to Montana to assess the situation. He said his group also intends to organize a convoy to bring food and other basic necessities to the Freemen compound.

And the Idaho-based Freemen Patriots of the Northwest announced plans to stage a demonstration at Lewistown, Mont., 120 miles west of Jordan, to protest the federal government's actions in Garfield County.

"If we have enough numbers, we could prevent another Waco from happening through peaceful resistance," said Edward

"
The key thing here is that we need a peaceful solution to this problem. They need to come out and face their forum in a court of law and state their problems in a court of law under a system that is just.
"

— John Parsons
Tri-State Militia of South Dakota

LeStage, spokesman for the group based in Kamiah, Idaho. LeStage said his group is not connected to the Freemen outside Jordan and does not necessarily share their views.

In 1993, the FBI launched a tear gas assault on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, after a 51-day standoff. Cult leader David Koresh and 80 followers died in a fire that the government says the sect members set.

The standoff in Montana started with the arrests of LeRoy Schweitzer and Daniel Petersen Jr. Schweitzer was transferred Saturday from a jail at Billings to a federal prison medical center in Missouri because he had been on a hunger strike. He resumed eating and drinking after the transfer, U.S. Attorney Sherry Scheel Matteucci said.

Also on Saturday, another member of the Freemen, Richard E. Clark, turned himself in to FBI agents at a friend's home near Grass Range in central Montana. No court appearance had been scheduled; jailers said he refused to be fingerprinted or photographed and would not speak.

Schweitzer and Peterson are charged with threatening public officials and millions of dollars worth of bank, financial and mail fraud.

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