

Republicans running for Oregon governor defended Capitol attack

Video of remarks came to light when conservative group complained about being censored by YouTube

By JULIA SHUMWAY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

BAKER CITY — A panel of Oregon Republican candidates for governor, including one currently facing federal criminal charges for assaulting police officers at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, uniformly insisted recently that the events of that January day were a righteous protest.

Reed Christensen, Brandon Merritt, Tim McCloud, Kerry McQuisten, Amber Richardson, Bill Sizemore and Marc Thielman made their comments at a private Republican forum in Baker City in late March.



Christensen



Merritt

“None of the first-person accounts I’ve heard line up with the media,” McQuisten said.

News organizations including the New York Times have obtained thousands of videos recorded by both rioters and police to reconstruct the events of the hours-long siege on the Capitol. Videos show frantic scrambles between police and protesters outside and inside the Capitol as crowds swarmed the building.

Sizemore, an anti-tax activist who was instrumental in passing several ballot measures and now owns a painting business in Redmond, referred to the Jan. 6 insurrection as an “understatement.”

He accused Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg of swaying election results, a theory that stems from grant money that election offices throughout the country received from a nonprofit organization supported by Zuckerberg. Local election officials used money to buy equipment, including personal protective equipment for election workers to reduce COVID infection risks, to pay staff and to adapt to changing laws, including in several states that greatly expanded mail voting because of the pandemic.

Sizemore said he was initially hesitant to believe false claims that the 2020 election was stolen, but that he’s become convinced people will do whatever it takes to win.

“We’re going to need more protests like Jan. 6,” Sizemore said.

In an email to the Capital Chronicle, Sizemore allowed that a “few bad actors” engaged in wrongdoing, but said Democrats and journalists were trying to make the incident seem worse than it was.

McCloud, a Salem business development analyst, said the Capitol and all government buildings belong to the American people and they have the right to enter it at any time.

Thielman, the former superintendent of the Alsea School District, said the attempted insurrection was a response to the government failure.

“When our courts wouldn’t hear it, when our Congress wouldn’t hear it, when our executive branch wouldn’t hear it, we the people did what our Constitution allows us to do,” he said. “It was a wonderful patriotic protest.”

He told the Capital Chronicle that the incident became a “mess,” and that he didn’t condone behavior like storming the Capitol or sitting in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s desk, both of which rioters did.

Richardson, a licensed massage therapist from White City, said she’s been part of a group “canvassing” elections in Jackson County, going door to door to talk to voters about fraud.

“Jan. 6 was not an insurrection,” she said. “Nov. 3 was, and we know that.”

She told the Capital Chronicle that she stood by her comments, and that she believes the media skewed perceptions of Jan. 6.

In November 2020, Jackson County Clerk Chris Walker found the phrase “VOTE DON’T WORK. NEXT TIME BULLETS” painted in 6-foot letters in the parking lot across from her office. Walker and other county clerks still receive regular threats and angry calls and emails from people about the 2020 election, and they’re preparing



Manuel Balce Ceneta/The Associated Press, File

Smoke fills the inside of the U.S. Capitol during the siege of Jan. 6, 2021. The deadly attack brought together members of disparate groups, creating the opportunity for extremists to establish links with each other.

to combat misinformation about the 2022 election.

Christensen, Merritt and McCloud did not immediately respond to emails Tuesday afternoon.

The Republican candidates’ response to questions about the Jan. 6 Capitol siege reflects a political divide in Oregon.

Recent polling from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found that about three-quarters of Democrats described the events as an attempted coup or insurrection, and most other Democrats thought it was best described as a “riot out of control.” A plurality of Republicans, 38%, said it was an out-of-control riot, but 16% described it as a reasonable protest and nearly a quarter said it was carried out by Trump’s political opponents.

The Oregon Republican Party last year passed a resolution declaring the incident a “false flag” operation. Christine Drazen, then the House GOP leader and now a candidate for governor, led all 23 House Republicans in con-

demning the state party for that resolution.

Another candidate, Sandy



John Minchillo/The Associated Press, File

In this Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, violent protesters storm the Capitol, in Washington.

Mayor Stan Pulliam, has spent months trying to walk back comments he made to Portland alt-weekly Willamette Week shortly after Jan.

6 blaming Trump for inciting violence. He now presents himself as the only candidate willing to say that the 2020 election was fraudulent.

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