

# Opinion

— EDITORIAL —

## LaVoy Finicum ...

They say there are three sides to every story—with that third side being a truth that usually falls somewhere in between the other two sides.

In the case of the shooting death of LaVoy Finicum in Harney County last week, as well the entire Malheur National Wildlife Refuge standoff, the sides are too numerous to even count at this point.

We've watched and analyzed the video of Finicum's death released by the FBI dozens of times by now, and our first reaction was to question why the video quality seemed to have been exported to a lower resolution than the camera originally took, and why it was labeled unedited, when by definition the redaction of information around the perimeter of the video *is* editing. Because of this, we, like many, were wary from the start. That the bulk of the scarce "official" information coming out of the City of Burns and Harney County was FBI-filtered and controlled, didn't help our level of trust, either.

As we got into the video, it became sadly clear that unless a person was there on the ground when the scene unfolded (and maybe not even then), all anyone can do is offer up opinions based on their best judgment.

Yes, Finicum's hands were clearly raised when he stepped out of the truck. But what then? What about when his arms dropped? And what caused him to speed away from the first road block to begin with? Was he fired upon? We have educated opinions. But we don't know.

We watched video interviews from four separate witnesses: the driver of the other vehicle (whose testimony felt somehow emotionally "off" to us), the two women in Finicum's truck, and a family stopped outside the barricade as the scene unfolded. We've talked with those we know and trust in law enforcement and those we know and trust in groups like the Oath Keepers and Pacific Patriots Network. We've talked with ranchers and military veterans who have seen their share of active duty combat. There is no uniform consensus and likely never will be.

The majority but not all of the combat veterans believe Finicum's first hand movements and slight dance to the side to be consistent with every time they've seen a gunshot victim reach for a wound in shock. The majority, but certainly not all of the law enforcement officers, believe that same movement was consistent with Finicum reaching for his 9 mm. Multiple sources stated that belief was partially based on intel that he had the gun on him. How would the FBI have known that, save for a plant inside the Refuge?

And the ranchers? They're divided, with most pointing out immediately that their first thought was how slick cowboy boots are in snow, and the movement, perhaps, was a simple attempt to catch his balance.

We all bring our experiences and perceptions into our analyses. One of our thoughts is that reality is probably a combination of those theories.

We do think that OSP opened fire

prematurely. But that's easy to say from our vantage point in front of a computer screen. We suspect they were likely unprepared for Finicum's truck to arrive at their road block to begin with, which we also suspect was in place primarily to prevent other traffic from reaching the first block intended to stop the Bundy group. We get that troopers had literally half a second to make a life-and-death judgment call.

But then we see those arms up at the start and think if a man is intent on a shootout or suicide by cop, wouldn't he have had a weapon in hand from the moment he stepped out of the truck, guns blazing?

We wonder why audio hasn't been released. We wonder why it looks, at least from the reaction of the trooper who emerges from the treeline and Finicum himself, why law enforcement is yelling commands from two different sides. Was he being told from one side to toss down his gun and from the other side to raise his hands? We don't know that either. But that type of colossal mistake is possible considering troopers were positioned across from each other, in each other's lines of fire, when we doubt they should have been. Why was the truck then fired upon?

The whole situation is one complicated cluster. Imagine the bloodbath that could have ensued had the FBI/OSP engaged the Refuge itself—we're assuming that possibility is why they initiated a "traffic stop" in a remote area instead. We wish they hadn't initiated any high risk move at all, and this is one of our biggest problems with what happened last week. The FBI was pressured by our own governor and by the White House to act quickly as we understand it. While the standoff at the Refuge was a poorly planned idea from the get-go, ending it quickly was not worth the loss of even one life. All avenues of negotiation had not been exhausted and we believe so much could have been handled differently.

From the standpoint that shots hadn't been fired and no injuries had been sustained in the three weeks prior, the standoff had been "peaceful," as so many pointed out. However, the actions of some of those who arrived to join the Bundy clan at the Refuge, while not overtly violent, were certainly confrontational whenever a select few ventured away from the Refuge and out into Burns. We've talked with too many people who experienced issues firsthand to believe otherwise, which contributes to the argument that the standoff was not entirely "peaceful." When behavior like this happens, the message of the protest gets lost.

We hope that message *doesn't* become lost. The Hammonds are still behind bars serving a ridiculously harsh sentence, and Federal agencies such as the USFS and BLM continue their overreach into the lives of law-abiding citizens more so with each passing year. From the Refuge situation, if a positive has come, it's more widely spread attention to these issues. We view the rash of well thought out protests, such as the one planned for this weekend in Halfway, as another significant positive—it shows at least Americans are paying attention to the events that affect them.

Finally, our prayers are with those left behind in LaVoy Finicum's family. Let's also remember a life was lost, and show some basic respect.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— GUEST COLUMN —

*So I was thinking ...*

## Things overheard at the grocery store

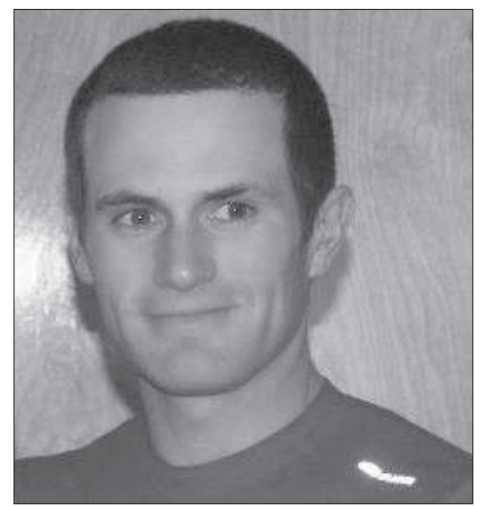
By Jimmy Ingram  
Special to The Baker County Press

If you've been anywhere in public in your life, chances are you've overheard conversations between people you wish you hadn't. For me, that place is usually the grocery store. I don't *want* to be privy to these conversations among strangers but some things once heard cannot be unheard.

(Said to friend) "Yeah, my biggest flaw is just that I'm too kind." Dear Mrs. Perfect: Something tells me that self-awareness may not be your strong suit. We all have flaws but if this really is the biggest problem with your personality, you have officially obtained Mother Teresa status. So while some may consider your mid-morning malt liquor purchase to be a sign of perhaps bigger flaws, I'm going to take you at your word and feel inspired to be better person. I can confidently say my biggest flaws are way worse than yours.

(Said to friend) "I ain't gotta work. I'm smart enough I got this system figured out." Dear Mr. Motivation: While it is possible I have taken your phrase out of context, I have a pretty good idea what you are saying. Your superior intelligence, accentuated with use of the word "ain't," has allowed you a lifestyle devoid of something as trivial as employment. Hard to believe that men like Louis Pasteur, Henry Ford, and Nikola Tesla weren't smart enough to figure out "the system," too. They, along with most of the good men and women in our community, are clearly a few steps behind you, and as a result have to get up and go to work every week. So while your statement indicates that a job is clearly beneath you, please don't make the rest of us feel too bad about it. You may not realize it, but the employment of others is to your benefit.

(Said to friend) "So I told her to shut her mouth and finish making me dinner." Dear Mr. Romantic: What a lucky lady you must have. I'm sure she's awfully smitten with a sweet talker like you. I don't know (or care to know) the details of your relationship, but I suspect you should familiarize yourself with the "TV dinner" aisle of the grocery store because you may be making your own



Submitted Photo

Jimmy Ingram is a local farmer and father of two who enjoys people watching within our wonderful community and beyond.

meals sooner than you think. And while your buddy seems impressed at your story about "laying down the law," deep down he and the rest of us know your relationship advice is probably best ignored. The only thing worse than a jerk is a guy bragging about being a jerk.

(Said to checker) "These club cards are so stupid, why can't we just use coupons like we used to?" Dear Coupon Lover: Let me try and understand your logic. You prefer the act of digging through papers, searching for scissors, clipping small coupons and trying to remember to bring them (before they expire) to the store over the act of handing your club card to the checker? I understand there's a certain nostalgia to clipping coupons but there's also nostalgia in churning your own butter, and I suspect based on your purchase you aren't doing that. I've never heard anyone say, "I really wish this was more difficult," but in effect that *is* what you're saying. I'm sure if time permitted you'd have an ease-of-use argument for VHS over DVD but thankfully you and the bewildered checker have completed the transaction.

(Said to checker) "Why would I bring my ID to the store!?" Dear Ms. Anonymous: While the purchase of grocery items doesn't necessarily require ID, beer and cigarette purchases do. You are trying to buy both, and you look young. This isn't a new law, and for the sake of the store and the employee's job it isn't a lot for them to ask. Given your attitude, you seem to feel you're immune to these formalities but the fact that you "just left the doctor's office and have had a bad day" still doesn't qualify as valid ID. We're all sorry your ongoing argument with the checker is proving to be futile. There's is a chance the manager you just asked to speak with will be more sympathetic. But more than likely he'll tell you what the sign behind the counter says: "No ID, no beer." Pretty simple.

You never know what you'll hear or see going out in public. Seeing friends and members of the community is always nice, but sometimes the things you hear from strangers boggles the mind. I guess the best thing you can do is ignore it ... or in my case write about it. Happy shopping.

## — LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

### I disagree with the guest opinion

To the Editor:

Anne Marie Gurney's extravagant praise for Ronald Reagan's presidency (January 29th) is both unfounded and inaccurate. Reagan hardly produced "a track record of success."

Instead of economic expansion, Ronald Reagan ushered in an era of increasing poverty for many of us and untold riches for a few at the very top. His extreme tax cuts for the wealthy crippled our ability to counter the effects of the off-shoring and automation of good-paying jobs, which began in the late 1970s, and continues today. And he tripled our national debt.

Reagan was a false prophet. His "firm and forceful" ideology led us astray. His supply-side, trickle-down economics had no basis in reality. His rants against government were misplaced. The question is not the size of government, but whether

government is working on our behalf.

Certainly, today it is not. There is fear and disgust among the American electorate. But it's really caused by stagnant wages and the control of elections and legislators by big money, not government "overreach."

It's apparent that many *The Baker County Press* readers believe that government has fallen into the hands of communists who seek to control us. But the truth is, as Rev. Martin Luther King warned: "This country has socialism for the rich, rugged individualism for the poor."

Yes, as Ms. Gurney's op-ed says, "... Voters are tired of the same ol' thing." It's time for us to lay blind ideology aside and come together to forge a political movement that puts government back on our side, that makes government work for all of us.

**Marshall McComb**

Chair of the Baker County Democrats  
Baker City

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