

Local

Anti-patriot meeting results in police call

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This presentation was part of ROP's statewide tour, "Beyond Burns: the Growing Patriot Movement in Oregon," which included the following locations, in addition to Baker City: St. Helens, Columbia County; Eugene, Lane County; Medford, Jackson County; Bend, Deschutes County; Canyon City, Grant County; Lostine, Wallowa County; and La Grande, Union County.

Speakers and guest speakers for the presentation included PCA Founding Member Wix Colby, PCA Member Rob Crawford, ROP Co-Director Cara Shufelt, ROP Co-Director Jessica Campbell, and Baker County Democratic Central Committee (BCDCC) Chair Marshall McComb.

Between 30 and 40 were in attendance, including Baker County Commissioner-elect Bruce Nichols, Baker County Planning Commission Chair Alice Trindle, BCP-FHD Member Roxanna Swann, Ed Hardt, Bobbie Danser, Gary Dielman, Dave Hunsaker, Jake Brown, Jim Iler, Susan Triplett, Marilyn Dudek, Margaret Durner, Chris Lawrence, Carla Inman, John Wright, Kasey Wright, Michael Edera, Frank McCleary, Richard Cochran, and Whit Deschner, among others.

Colby introduced himself, welcomed the crowd, and listed a few of the goals of the Halfway, Oregon-based PCA, in sponsoring the event, including, "...to promote a strong sense of community; to be open-minded towards all who want reasonable, and lawful change; and to strengthen our communities, by finding common ground on the issues. It's important that we try to create, in this discussion we're going to have, a climate where everyone feels safe, and secure; and where everyone's empowered to speak up, and share their viewpoints, and feelings, and concerns, about our local communities. We must recognize that we should be able to disagree, and do so in a safe place."

Colby introduced Campbell and the topic of discussion, he mentioned the material available at the presentation, including the for-sale book, "Up In Arms: A Guide to Oregon's Patriot Movement," and he explained the rules associated with the presentation: attendees needed to save questions until the end of the presentation, which were to be written on index cards provided, and then collected for the question-and-answer period, following the presentation.

Following the Q&A session, there would be information presented by Crawford and McComb, Colby said, regarding PCA and BCDCC activity, and attendees would form into discussion groups, after that. In speaking about the event and discussion, Colby called the location a "sacred spot."

Campbell, prior to a slide show presentation, pointed out and explained the presence of the ROP-hired, All African People's Revolutionary Party-connected security team,

a presence which caused feelings of intimidation and tension among several attendees.

Two of the guards wore T-shirts emblazoned with the New Black Panthers logo.

She said that ROP had received threats, events have been disrupted, among other issues in the past, and that "...the purpose of the security here today, is to ensure that we have a space that is safe for everyone to have conversations."

She said that these statewide presentations, however, involved minimal interruption (none was noted during the presentation). Campbell was joined up front by two members from the security team, and Dudek was seated at a table near Campbell, capturing images with her cell phone.

Another member of the All African People's Revolutionary Party, Ahjamu Umi, of Portland, posted to his Facebook page in reference to the ROP booklet and meetings, "Just like radical organizing in Africa, these brave souls within the Rural Organizing Project take extreme personal risks by fighting against white supremacy in rural Oregon. While working with other comrades to do our best to protect them as they present this vital info on the militia movement, I'm seeing the white nationalists in the room who daily attempt to intimidate them. Their work is critical and should be supported by all white people who call themselves accomplices/allies. This is a must read."

Campbell's slide show included, as the first item, the goals of the discussion: raise awareness of the perceived crises rural Oregonian is facing due to eroding community infrastructure; deepen understanding of the Patriot movement and its political and socioeconomic roots from their group's point of view; and open up a conversation about what rural Oregon needs, so the area can have healthy and vibrant communities, where everyone can live their lives with dignity and safety.

The catalyst and inspiration for ROP's movement was the Sugar Pine Mine occupation, in Josephine County, in April 2015, Campbell said.

She said that a Josephine County chapter of the Oath Keepers called for a national mobilization, in order to protect the miners, who were asked by the Bureau of Land Management to submit a Plan of Operations, but instead asked for the mobilization, "a Bundy Ranch-style reunion."

Campbell claimed that there was a lack of law enforcement presence, causing vulnerability with locals, and enforcement problems, and the locals were frightened by the "militia."

Oath Keepers, however, is not a militia.

She displayed more slides, along with information similar to what's presented in "Up In Arms," including claims about issues with the Three Percenters, the Oath Keepers, the Constitutional Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association, the Pacific Patriots Network, and elected-of-

ficials. Baker County Commission Chair Bill Harvey was included throughout the book, as part of the "Patriot Movement" claim, partly because of his involvement with the process of agency-to-agency coordination. Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer is also targeted as a subject in the book.

One of the claims she presented included "inside/outside strategies" the "movement" uses to gain control. She said "inside strategies" include: pass resolutions and encourage local officials to take symbolic stands; run candidates for local offices; recruit law enforcement; taker over county Republican parties; and community service.

She said "outside strategies" include: militia as community infrastructure; Committees of Safety; "Common Law" Grand Juries; Sovereign Citizen crank legal theories; and threats and intimidation.

After the slide show, Shufelt asked attendees to discuss, among themselves, what was presented, and to submit questions, using the index cards, for the Q&A session.

Shufelt and Campbell then addressed some of the questions provided by attendees, with the Q&A session.

Shufelt said there were a couple of questions specifically about Baker County, and she asked Crawford to present his information first.

Baker County Democrat Chair McComb, also in the audience, was asked to present his information following Crawford.

Crawford introduced himself as a "small potatoes rancher from Halfway," and he spoke about the occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge, a scenario he was glad didn't play out in Baker County. He said that, following the tragic death of Robert LaVoy Finicum, he heard of the post-occupation rally, "Rural Lives Matter," which as reported earlier in on-site coverage by this newspaper, was not a rally in support of the actions during the occupation, but rather, an effort to bring attention to rural issues in general.

Crawford spoke about the back-and-forth Letters to the Editor between he and Brown, a debate sparked by the rally, and he brought up claimed issues with groups such as the Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, etc.

Crawford said that Brown was "dismissive" of people's fears at the rally.

Crawford began efforts to have the PCA become more involved in local politics, and he said that, "Ultimately, our side won the primary election for County Commissioner (Nichols), by 37 votes... The election, ultimately, was very civil, and very thoughtful... Summarizing ... how do we engage people, how do we work in common, for our community rather than for some remote agenda, and how do we help each other."

McComb introduced himself, and he said that in addition to being a staunch supporter of the ROP, he "happens to also be" Chair of the BCDCC. "I have to tell you that, in all honesty..." he said. He displayed

his bullet points (both Crawford and McComb elicited laughter with this phrase) in order to attempt to explain how he views the issues.

"I'm highlighting here (motioning to his bullet points), the form of structure that's known as the Republican Central Committee of Baker County, mainly because they have been persistent, it seems to me, in inviting outside influences into our county, and to me, it's distressful because I think it's distracting us from what we really need to accomplish," McComb said. "I'm not trying to be mean; I'm just trying to say, this is something that's happening."

"Part of it, I can attribute to the outside influence of movies. There are two movies that have been released, called 'The Agenda,' which basically tell us about the conspiracy that the communists have taken over the government, which puts everything that happens in the context that the government is our enemy. So, we couldn't trust them, for example, in the area of global warming, because that would be a plot by the government to take more power over..."

"Talk radio, I think we're familiar with. There's another influence, where people have all these different theories about how the Constitution is written, and so forth, so there's a bunch of outside influences."

"It seems like it has created kind of a closed body, which has left a lot of—talking to Republicans in town—left them out in the cold; they feel like they've been excluded from the process."

"When you talk about a structural problem, I can't say much about the communists having taken over the government, but what I do know is that there's a tremendous concentration of wealth, in the hands of very few people in this country, that's starving the rest of us. That's something that requires *more* government, to solve that problem. So, you can see, there's room for discussion."

"At the same time, I want to emphasize, my relationship with the Chair of the (Republican) Party, or with Bill Harvey, our County Commissioner, tries to remain very cordial. I wouldn't say we're totally friendly, because we have disagreements, but, we try to say, 'Let's work together; let us not have any kind of a barrier between us.'

"A little quick history, outside stuff, coming in (he motioned to the rest of his bullet points). People remember the Kyle Knight episode, who was on the School Board. Kyle Knight sort of said he was a member of the Tea Party, but he was actually trained by something called the Western Liberty Network, which had, as a goal, taking over the county government. Kyle Knight was sort of a precursor in, that, well, there were recall elections, and lawsuits, and several things that happened, that disrupted the School Board's operation..."

McComb referred to a recall attempt of two School Board members, who petitioners claimed had

infringed upon Knight's first amendment rights. While the recall failed by a narrow margin, Knight was ultimately victorious in his subsequent legal efforts, his claims validated.

McComb continued, "In the 2014 Primary, Bill Harvey defeated a long-time County Commission Chair (Fred Warner, Jr.), who had made the decision to change his party affiliation, from Democrat to Republican... So, we have a person here, who's an advocate of the coordination theory, dealing with the federal government, through using assumed authority of coordination."

"As a response to that, last year, Measure 1-63 Coalition, of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, coming together, to at least try and work on issues in the Primary... so that everybody would get a chance to help select a candidate... so, it wouldn't be just a majority Republican Party..."

"This year, we had Bruce Nichols defeat an Oath Keeper (Kody Justus), for the County Commission position that was opening up (Commissioner Tim Kerns resigned his position, effective January 2017), by 37 votes—very close."

"Right now, heading into the General Election, (Sheriff) Travis Ash, competing with (Deputy) John Hoopes, for the position of County Sheriff. John Hoopes, as nearly as I can tell, being somebody that is aligned with the Constitutional law enforcement group ... So, there's an ideology."

"At the same time, we also have the same, basic coalition (Measure 1-74 Coalition)—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, working to pass Measure 1-74 ... Trying to have a non-partisan County Commission."

In actuality, The Baker County Republican Party voted unanimously to oppose Measure 1-74.

McComb continued, "So, the combination of what I see as being outside influences, which hamper our ability to solve the real problems... We have a coalition of people, that are working the best they can, to keep our government operating with a clear mind, and open heart, instead of outside ideologies."

Shufelt asked attendees to form into smaller discussion groups (two groups of about ten people each), but by that point, several of the attendees had left.

Following the presentation, an incident involving the security team and several attendees prompted a call to the Baker City Police Department (BCPD), from Brown.

Brown found the team's behavior threatening (a member of the team also stated to Brown that he was required to fill out the sign-in sheet, Brown also said later), and he told the BCPD that he believed one or more of the team members stated or implied they carried weapons, to include possibly a firearm.

On ROP's website, on October 9, the following was included in a blog about the presentation: "After the event wrapped up, two police officers arrived and explained

that someone with a local militia group called them, suggesting that our security team might be carrying weapons. The irony was not lost on any of us, and the police were not pleased, even mentioning that the 'open carry guys' creep them out."

Facts of the case contradict that statement.

Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner said Brown reported that one team member stated that he carried a firearm, and one stated he had a knife. When officers arrived, they didn't notice any obvious signs of weapons, but team members were cryptic about what organization they were with. The officers didn't perform a complete "pat down," but rather, performed a visual check. The call was cleared without further incident.

In reference to ROP's comment about open carry, Lohner said, "We see citizens frequently with open carry, and it's normal. I've never heard any of our officers make comments about open carry bothering them. It's everybody's right, and if someone's actually carrying out in the open, I would rather them do that than hiding something from us."

The police dispatch log doesn't include any reference to Brown being part of any group (Lohner said he didn't see any indication of a group, let alone, a "militia" reference), and Brown said later that he's not even a member of Oath Keepers anymore.

He further explained that Oath Keepers is not a militia group, and he's a member of a different group, involved simply in emergency preparedness. Baker County no longer has an official Oath Keepers chapter.

Lohner said that the BCPD has not encountered issues with Oath Keepers in the past.

ROP also stated that six members of the "... Baker County Patriot movement..." attended the presentation, but every one of them left "...when the event opened up for discussion..."

Unclear is who the six were or in which movement they had ever been involved. More audience members also left, in addition to the six, but Brown (he suspects he was one they labeled) said he needed to leave, because he arrived with others who provided transportation, and they were leaving.

He added that "patriot" isn't a derogatory word.

Jim Iler (he suspects he was also labeled), prior to the group discussions, also left, saying, "I can't take any more; it's misrepresentation."

Finally, the ROP's site states, "Everywhere we visit, we are hearing that many people are nervous, even frightened, to attend meetings and political events in their communities."

The Baker County Public Library's public meeting room regularly holds groups of all kinds.

Town halls in Baker County for both Democrat and Republican elected officials in the past have been very well-attended, and candidate forums and political banquets in the area are often standing-room only.