



PHOTO BY K. KENDALL

# Jarvis Kennedy

*From the Malheur Refuge to Standing Rock, the Paiute tribal councilman reflects on two occupations*

**BY STEPHEN QUIRKE**  
STAFF WRITER

At the beginning of this year the small town of Burns made national headlines after it came under siege by anti-government extremists led by Utah's Ammon Bundy.

After marching through Burns on Jan. 2 (part of the Burns Paiute Indian Reservation), the entourage took up residence at the government office overseeing the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, occupying the building for over a month. There they made friends with local "constitutional sheriff" Glenn Palmer, solicited snacks from the public, and went on tirades against government tyranny and environmental regulation.

Just days into the occupation, the Burns Paiute Tribe held a press conference to remind people whose land they were actually on. Tribal councilman Jarvis Kennedy shared the tribe's brutal history of forced removal at the hands of European invaders, and explained to the public that the militias "just need to get the hell out of here."

Weeks would pass before police made

their first arrest, with the Bundy clan eventually landing in Multnomah County Jail.

On Sept. 9, Kennedy was in Portland for the jury selection in the occupiers' trial. While here, he attended a rally in Pioneer Courthouse Square to show support for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota, who are currently gathered in an encampment with several thousand people to defend regional water sources from the Dakota Access oil pipeline. Kennedy spoke with Street Roots about the current situation in North Dakota, the Malheur occupation, and the ongoing trial of the Bundys and crew in Portland.

**Stephen Quirke:** *There seems to be a real difference in the treatment of native people at Standing Rock compared to the white occupiers of the Malheur refuge, despite the fact that the native group is unarmed, while the people at Malheur were heavily armed. How do you account for that difference?*

**Jarvis Kennedy:** Well, you can tell the difference on the media coverage – it's not on the news. And like I said at our press

conference there in Burns, what would happen if my native brothers and sisters occupied a federal building? We would've been dealt with pretty fast. And these guys were free to roam for what, a month and a half? They were eating in Burns, driving around, with people taking them food, taking them firewood. And look what's happening over there in Standing Rock. The media covered the militia thing from day one, even before they occupied that federal building, all the way till the end. Now this trial's coming up, and they're gonna be here again.

You don't see no coverage on the Dakota Pipeline. You don't see nothing – just on Facebook. You see the difference? I don't know if it's because it's a bunch of Indians, or because these guys are white and carrying guns. I didn't see no natives over there having any weapons, and yet they got attacked by dogs – women and kids! It's all about the money, once you come down to it. Because that's what people want. Money buys whatever they want. But it's not just an Indian thing, it's a human race thing. We can't drink oil. We can't throw oil on the field and expect to grow something. You've got to have water.

**S.Q.:** *Some of the Bundy militia-men were later supported by a group called the Pacific Patriot Network. Do you think the Bundys are patriots?*

**J.K.:** They're not even close. I think the real patriots are the ones that are over in Standing Rock standing up for the land, standing up for the water, standing up against that black snake that's gonna be going through there. Imagine if that thing broke. We all saw that Exxon Valdez up there in Alaska. There's still effects from that. They say you can dig down a couple inches and see nothing but black. That's crazy. Imagine that thing getting in the main water source.

**S.Q.:** *Did you get many messages of support during the Malheur occupation?*

**J.K.:** There was a lot of support. My Facebook was blowin' up. Once my phone wouldn't stop ringing, and text messages came in from all across the country. We didn't really want a conflict, because we gotta think of the elders and the kids in the outcome – not just the tribal people but the people of Harney County. And the last thing we need is violence. There's enough violence out there already. We just stood our ground and told everybody relax, pray for us. All we need is prayers – good thoughts coming our way. Now they're all gone.

**S.Q.:** *Were many people afraid of the militia when they were occupying Harney County?*

**J.K.:** Yeah, a lot of people were scared, 'cause you've got all these guys that we don't know carrying guns, I mean there's car loads of them. We lost one of the head

archaeologists at the Malheur Refuge

I seen them guys yesterday, Ammon and Ryan and all those other guys right there in the Courthouse. These other militia people that were supporting them were trying to talk to me, like 'Hi guys!' I wanted to sock 'em up, but I can't, or I'd be right there with 'em. You just gotta maintain, and keep your cool, and see what happens.

Hopefully the judicial system does what it's supposed to do, 'cause I already know how it works against people of color and Native Americans – and anybody else. But we'll see how the law affects some rootin' tootin' cowboys with their guns. That's what I'm interested in. They're bringing up the Latter-Day Saints stuff in there, so who knows.

**S.Q.:** *They do seem to have an interesting legal strategy.*

**J.K.:** Yeah – they told on themselves when they were making all those films and documenting everything and posting it. They convicted themselves already, I'm just waiting for the outcome.

**S.Q.:** *Was it odd for you to see that volume of media attention for the small aspects of the Bundy occupation, like snack requests, versus this massive support for the Standing Rock protest?*

**J.K.:** Every day. Every news hour they were on there. The snacks, and then the toys on the desk. That was funny, (laughter) That was hilarious. I was eating dinner when that happened, and almost spit out my food laughing. But they're not protestors that are out there at Standing Rock, they're protectors. They ain't looking for glory, they ain't looking to be martyrs. They're just trying to protect the land.

**S.Q.:** *Is it true that the Bundys were allowed to roam free for over a month, despite their members threatening people's kids and federal employees?*

**J.K.:** And following them, and all this other stuff, and even following the dispatchers of the police, even the BLM people – following them! And what's crazy about it, in the jury selection, the judge is talking about the First Amendment, Second Amendment – that someone can carry a gun around and not have any intent to use it. But if I see someone with a gun, I'm like, damn! First thing – I'm watching him.

Recently some of them even called me and left a message, and somebody was saying, "Why are you here? What's your intentions?" It's really crazy. They're not really worth talking to or worth mentioning. Who are they? They're not an authority figure. That's how the tribe figured when they wanted us to go get our artifacts. You guys ain't nobody. You're just a redneck with a gun – that wants snacks.