

At right, demonstrators protest the Oregonians for Immigration Reform event at the Best Western in Salem, April 8. The event featured a speech by Jessica Vaughan with the Center for Immigration Studies, which the Southern Policy Law Center has labeled a hate group. Below, Vaughan, shown here on a recent Fox News broadcast, is a regular on the channel, pushing for policies that target immigrants.



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

Anti-immigrant 'hate group' speaker met with protests in Salem, Portland

Environmental, immigrant rights groups decry visit from Jessica Vaughan

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

Before they could make it inside a Salem Best Western for their general meeting on April 8, Oregonians for Immigration Reform members passed by protesters holding up signs in support of immigrants.

Oregonians for Immigration Reform has been behind repeated campaigns to pass ballot measures targeting immigrants. One of their ongoing measure efforts would make Oregon an "English only" state, and another calls for mandated use of E-Verify for all employment.

The group was also behind the successful defeat of Measure 88 in 2014, effectively denying undocumented immigrants the ability to obtain driver's licenses.

But it wasn't just the policy agenda of Oregonians for Immigration Reform that protesters were in Salem to decry, they were there to denounce its guest of honor: Jessica Vaughan.

She was met by protest again three days later when she came to Portland's Lewis & Clark college for a panel discussion closed to the public.

Vaughan is the policy director at a think tank based in Washington, D.C., that according to Southern Poverty Law Center, is nothing short of a hate group in sheep's clothing, "standing at the nexus of the American nativist movement."

It's called Center for Immigration Studies, and it earned the hate-group designation because it publishes the works of white nationalists and anti-Semitic authors.

It also releases fear-mongering "studies" and "reports" full of cherry-picked and misleading information, many written by Vaughan herself.

Their findings promote anti-immigrant sentiment against undocumented and documented immigrants alike.

That Oregonians for Immigration Reform would have a representative from this group at its meeting, said Diane Goodwin, "is a further example of its white-nationalist connections." Goodwin is the communications director at Basic Rights Oregon, which was just one of many groups protesting the event.

The damage that Center for Immigration Studies causes is far-reaching, with much of its misinformation going viral in online conservative circles, often making it onto the lips of politicians and Fox TV News pundits.

One study from the think tank claimed the Obama administration released 36,000 "criminal aliens." Another claimed 72 terrorists have come to the U.S. from the countries on Trump's travel-ban list since 9/11. Both these reports, while loosely based on actual data, were widely debunked. Neither passed the Washington Post's "Pinocchio Test" after prominent Republican party members repeated their findings.

But regardless of the Center's reports inability to pass a basic fact check, fringe-media outlets, such as Breitbart and TheBlaze, can't resist widely disseminating their xenophobic clickbait findings as news.

"Her organization has spread a lot of misinformation about immigrants," said Laura Stevens of the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club. Stevens is also the spokesperson for a newly-formed environmental committee that took the lead in organizing the Saturday afternoon protest.

"Our mission is to protect the planet for all people, regardless of national origin," said

Stevens. "The climate crisis is already creating climate refugees, and some are already coming to Oregon from the Pacific Islands."

She said the environmental committee, which includes Climate Solutions, 350 Salem, Oregon League of Conservation Voters and many others, were there to show that Oregonians for Immigration Reform do not represent true Oregon values.

By 1 p.m., about 20 protesters had already gathered at the entrance to the parking lot of the Best Western Mill Creek Inn, where Oregonians for Immigration Reform's general meeting was set to begin in one hour.

As pick-up trucks and other vehicles carrying passengers — mostly senior citizens — poured in, many shook their heads and gave a thumbs down to protesters. One man gave them the bird.

Many of the groups participating in the protest are members of One Oregon, a broad, statewide coalition that formed in the wake of Trump's election to stand against anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies and ballot measures.

Its members include labor unions, immigrant rights groups, faith-based organizations and many other advocacy and nonprofit organizations, including Street Roots.

But it was member environmental groups that took the lead on Saturday, marking the first time they've come together for immigrant rights.

One reason environmental groups are taking a stand, said Stevens, is to call out Oregonians for Immigration Reform's tactic of "greenwashing their message of bigotry by

See PROTEST, page 5