

A tale of two sheriffs

Sheriff Ward stood up for his community while Sheriff Palmer subverted his

When a tough guy loses his composure, it startles us. That happened last week at the FBI press conference following the arrest of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupiers.

Following an FBI agent and a deputy U.S. prosecutor for Oregon, it was Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward's turn at the microphone. Speaking without notes, Ward fought to contain his emotions as he described how the armed occupation had torn the town of Burns apart.

Beneath the national story of armed occupiers versus the feds were two significant subplots. One of them was just what Sheriff Ward described — the stress of feeling incipient violence in the midst of a small rural town. The other subplot was the tale of two sheriffs.

While Sheriff Ward was one of the solid, impressive players in this drama, Sheriff Glenn Palmer of adjoining Grant County was at best, embarrassing, and at worst, an enabler of lawbreakers, putting his own county's residents at risk.

A major motif of the mythology of the West is the sheriff who defends his community from armed invaders. Palmer effectively threw his support to the outsiders, preferring hotheads instead of the rule of law.

Unwittingly, it was Palmer's invitation to Ammon Bundy that drew Bundy and his leadership core to John Day on the fateful afternoon of Jan. 26. The FBI set up a highway block at the county line, arresting Bundy and seven others and killing one.

Sheriffs occupy a unique place in American law enforcement. While they must be certified by the Oregon Board of Police Standards and Training, they are not hired in the manner of a police chief or FBI agent. They are elected at the ballot box. That allows many of them to assume they have leeway that police chiefs do not. And it gives a sheriff the opportunity to make boneheaded moves, unchecked by a superior.

Prior to the appearance of the Malheur refuge occupiers, Sheriff Palmer decided last September that he would write a natural resource management plan for Grant County. The County Court (its governing body) reminded Palmer that he had no authority to do so. Then Palmer made sheriff's deputies of a group of 11 citizens to execute the task.

In his remarks beckoning the lawbreakers inside the Malheur Refuge, Sheriff Palmer exhibited three self-destructive characteristics.

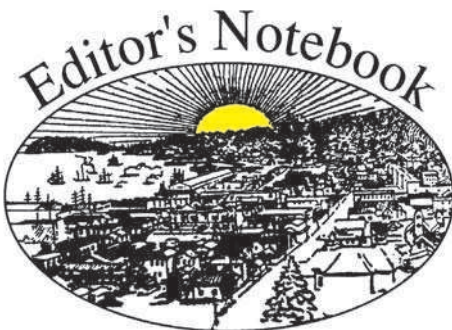


Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward speaks at press conference at the Harney County Community Center in Burns, Jan. 27.



Steve Forrester



As with his baseless attempt to write a county natural resources plan, Palmer acted as though he were a law unto himself. And by intimating that the armed lawbreakers would be welcomed in Grant County, he undercut the sheriff of Harney County. Thirdly, Palmer chose to destabilize the communities' security and stability for which he is responsible.

Because they are elected by local people and thus particularly accountable to them, sheriffs and the deputies they employ are often the most well-liked law enforcement personnel. Especially in rural areas where their mission often includes search and rescue, sheriffs are rightly considered to be on the side of the people.

However, unlike a thousand years ago in Anglo-Saxon England when the role of neigh-



Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer

Unwittingly, it was Palmer's invitation to Ammon Bundy that drew Bundy and his leadership core to John Day on that fateful afternoon.

enforce and who to enforce them against (Think sheriffs in the Jim Crow South).

Sheriff Palmer aligns himself with the so-called "constitutional sheriff" movement, in which mainly rural sheriffs and others like the Bundys designate themselves as the ultimate authorities on what is and is not "constitutional." Seldom possessing any actual training in constitutional law, they presume to interpret it for their counties. This arrogance flies in the face of everything that makes our nation great.

One of the primary strengths of our nation is one law for all. We can't afford to remain silent when local officials act outside this system.

— S.A.F.

Two questions for Sen. Bernie Sanders

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

When Bernie Sanders won election as mayor of Burlington, Vermont, in 1981, I called his office to see if there was a story there about a socialist elected official.

I was interning at *The Washington Post* (I didn't mention the intern part!) and spoke at length to some assistant who answered the phone in the mayor's office.

I asked about Sanders' plans, and the aide kept answering with "we" — which I thought a nice glimpse of contagious office socialism. After half an hour, I had enough to check with my editor, so I asked the aide's name. "Oh," he said a bit sheepishly, "actually, I'm Bernie Sanders."

Sanders' lack of political airs has helped catapult him forward in the presidential race, overcoming a 50-point deficit to just about tie Hillary Clinton in Iowa. He comes across as winningly uncalculated: Other candidates kiss babies; Sanders seems to fumble for a baby's "off" switch, so he can tell you more about inequality in America. Most politicians sweet-talk voters; he bellows at them.

I admire Sanders' passion, his relentless focus on inequality and his consistency. When he was sworn in as mayor of Burlington, he declared: "The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and the millions

of families in the middle are gradually sliding out of the middle class and into poverty." That has remained his mantra across 35 years. And yet, I still have two fundamental questions for Sanders:

Can you translate your bold vision into reality?

On that, frankly, I'm skeptical. I'm for Medicare for All, but it won't happen. And if it did, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a bipartisan group, found that Sanders' sums come up short by \$3 trillion over a decade.

Likewise, Sanders says he would prod America's allies in the Middle East to lead

the charge to defeat the Islamic State. Yes, but how? The United States has already been trying unsuccessfully to get these allies to do more against ISIS. What new leverage does he bring?

The Washington Post last month published a scathing editorial headlined "Bernie Sanders's Fiction-Filled Campaign." It derided his "fantastical claims" and added: "Sanders is not a brave truth-teller. He is a politician selling his own brand of fiction."

I think that's too harsh, for Sanders panders less than other politicians (a very low bar), and he has often staked out lonely positions that turned out to be correct — such as his opposition



Nicholas Kristof

Can Sanders accomplish his goals, and is he electable?

to the Iraq War. But there remains this open question of how he could achieve his ambitious agenda.

I also wonder if his age may be relevant here: Sanders would be 75 when he took office, by far the oldest person to become president (Reagan was 69; Clinton would be a slightly younger 69). Sanders now is indefatigable, but people often slow down in their late 70s and their 80s.

Another reason for skepticism is his congressional record. In 25 years in Congress, Sanders has been primary sponsor of just three bills that became law, and two were simply to rename post offices in Vermont; he did better with amendments. Clinton wasn't particularly effective as a legislator, either, but to me Sanders' record suggests that his strength is as a passionate advocate, not as a deal-maker who gets results.

Can you get elected? Or would your nomination make a President Cruz more likely?

When voters are polled today about how they would vote in a general election, Sanders does pretty well. For example, he beats Ted Cruz in the RealClearPolitics average, while Clinton loses to Cruz. But at this stage that's almost meaningless:



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks at a rally in Claremont, N.H., Tuesday. Sanders' lack of political airs has helped catapult him forward in the Democratic presidential primary.

Republicans are blasting Clinton while ignoring Sanders. If he were the nominee, he would be savaged.

One particularly sobering item for Sanders supporters: A Gallup poll last year asking voters what kind of person they would be unwilling to consider voting for. Six percent of Americans say they wouldn't vote for a Catholic, and 7 percent wouldn't support a black or a Jew. Some 24 percent wouldn't vote for a gay candidate, and more than a third would refuse to vote for a Muslim or an atheist.

However, the most objectionable kind of person by far was a socialist. Fifty percent of Americans said they would be unwilling to consider voting for a socialist.

Maybe Sanders could convince them that a "democratic socialist" isn't exactly a socialist, or maybe he could charm some voters into rethinking their beliefs. He has done just that very successfully in Vermont, a state where he now wins elections by overwhelming margins, and skeptics have been underestimating him for 35 years. But if a Democratic nominee starts off with half the voters unwilling to consider someone like him, that's a huge advantage for the Republican nominee.

So can he accomplish his goals, and is he electable? Lots of us admire Sanders and we would like reassurance.



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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