

Family held captive by Taliban-linked group released

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WASHINGTON — An American woman, her Canadian husband and their three young children have been released after years of being held captive by a group with ties to the Taliban and called a terrorist organization by the United States, American and Pakistani officials said Thursday.

U.S. officials said Pakistan secured the release of Caitlan Coleman of Stewartstown, Pa., and her husband, Canadian Joshua Boyle, who were abducted five years ago while traveling in Afghanistan and had been held by the Haqqani network.

Coleman was pregnant when she was captured. The couple had three children while in captivity, and all have been freed, U.S. officials said.

"Yesterday, the United States government, working in conjunction with the Government of Pakistan, secured the release of the Boyle-Coleman family from captivity in Pakistan," President Donald Trump said in a statement. "Today they are free."

Trump later praised Pakistan for its willingness to "do more to provide security in the region" and said he release suggests other "countries are starting to respect the United States of America once again."

The Pakistani military confirmed the release and said the



AP Photo/Bill Gorman

In this 2014 photo, from left, Patrick Boyle, Linda Boyle, Lyn Coleman and Jim Coleman hold a photo of their kidnapped children, Joshua Boyle and Caitlan Coleman, who were kidnapped by the Taliban in late 2012.

family was "being repatriated to the country of their origin."

But as of Thursday morning, the family's precise whereabouts were unclear and it was not immediately known when they would return to North America. The family was not in U.S. custody, though they were together in a safe, but undisclosed, location in Pakistan, according to a U.S. national security official, who wasn't authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

U.S. officials had planned on moving the family out of Pakistan on a U.S. transport

plane, but at the last minute Boyle would not get on, the official said.

Another U.S. official said Boyle was nervous about being in "custody" given his background. Boyle was previously married to the sister of Omar Khadr, a Canadian man who spent 10 years at Guantanamo Bay after being captured in 2002 in a firefight at an al-Qaida compound in Afghanistan.

Officials had discounted any link between that background and Boyle's capture, with one official describing it in 2014 as a "horrible coincidence."

The couple has told U.S. officials that they wanted to fly commercially to Canada, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the situation.

The release came together rapidly Wednesday. It happened nearly five years to the day since Coleman and Boyle lost touch with their families while traveling in a mountainous region near the Afghan capital of Kabul.

The couple set off in the summer 2012 for a journey that took them to Russia, the central Asian coun-



This still image made from a 2013 video released by the Coleman family shows Caitlan Coleman and her husband, Canadian Joshua Boyle in a militant video given to the family.

tries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and then to Afghanistan. Coleman's parents last heard from their son-in-law on Oct. 8, 2012, from an internet cafe in what Boyle described as an "unsafe" part of Afghanistan.

In 2013, the couple appeared in two videos asking the U.S. government to free them from the Taliban.

Coleman's parents, Jim and Lyn Coleman, told the online Circa News service in July 2016 that they received a letter from their daughter in November 2015, in which she wrote that she'd given birth to a second child in captivity. It's unclear whether they knew she'd had a third.

"I pray to hear from you again, to hear how everybody is doing," the letter said.

In that interview, Jim Coleman issued a plea to top Taliban commanders to be "kind and merciful" and let the couple go.

"As a man, father and now

grandfather, I am asking you to show mercy and release my daughter, her husband, and our beautiful grandchildren," Jim Coleman said. "Please grant them an opportunity to continue their lives with us, and bring peace to their families."

The family was being held by the Haqqani network. U.S. officials call the group a terrorist organization and have targeted its leaders with drone strikes. But the group also operates like a criminal network. Unlike the Islamic State group, it does not typically execute Western hostages, preferring to ransom them for cash.

The U.S. has long criticized Pakistan for failing to aggressively go after the Haqqanis. In recent remarks on his Afghanistan policy, Trump noted billions paid to Pakistan "at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately."



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Mike Holland-Moritz makes his way through part of Fort Stevens State Park on Wednesday in search of wild mushrooms.

Mushrooms: Can live for several hundred years

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Hunters and hunted

Mushroom caps gleam with slime, explode in overlapping sprays on the sides of fallen trees, peek out between tree roots or under pine needles. Fort Stevens State Park Ranger Dane Osis, who leads regular wild mushroom hikes through the park, has called the Oregon Coast one of the best places to hunt for mushrooms, especially for edible varieties.

Even if you return from a hunt empty-handed, seasoned North Coast mushroom hunters will say the worst thing that happened is you spent some time in the woods.

Interest in edible mushroom hunting has remained strong over the years, if not grown in popularity. Still, one of the North Coast's most visually stunning mushrooms is not for eating.

When fall turns the element-battered woods around Fort Stevens gray and brown and even the ferns have lost their shine, the fly amanita rises from the forest floor. It is a mushroom straight from the pages of "Alice in Wonderland," the fungi you find mixed among poodles and flowers in your smartphone's emoji options. With its brilliant red and orange cap and scattered white warts, it is the mushroom of popular culture. Troops of it march across



Stephen Walsh, of Portland, holds up a chanterelle mushroom he found while foraging with friends in Fort Stevens State Park.

the forest floor at Fort Stevens each fall; they can have unpredictable toxic, and possibly dangerous, effects if eaten, notes mycologist David Aurora in his guide to Western mushrooms "All That the Rain Promises and More."

In past years, however, people have come to Fort Stevens not to gape at the fly amanita, but to hunt for an unremarkable looking little mushroom with hallucinogenic powers. These mushrooms are considered a controlled substance, illegal to harvest or possess. Oregon State Police troopers and Clatsop County law enforcement once patrolled Fort Stevens State Park regularly this time of year. Across the Columbia River, rangers at

Washington state's Cape Disappointment State Park have had to keep an eye out for people looking for similar varieties there as well.

Oregon State Police Lt. Andrew Merila recently noted a decrease in the number of cases coming across his desk, but said this could be because he is not able to run as many patrols around Fort Stevens as in the past.

Fungi buddies

The above-ground parts of the mushroom — the prized "fruiting bodies" — people pick to eat for dinner, use to get high or simply appreciate for their strangeness and beauty only tell one side of the story, Cole said. Underground, the forest is a world of "infinite biological pathways," as ecologist Suzanne Simard said in a talk last summer — and mushrooms have a big role to play.

In recent years, Simard's work has contributed to a growing understanding of how forest ecosystems function, revealing that the below-ground part of the mushroom that digests nutrients and produces the above-ground fruiting bodies, the mycelium, often works in partnership with trees. The mycelium functions as an extension of the trees' root systems.

In his book "Mycelium Running," mycologist Paul Stamets writes that mycelium

is tiny enough that "one cubic inch of soil can contain enough to stretch for 8 miles."

"They're so small that it allows the trees access to way more water and soil nutrients than they'd be able to get on their own," Cole said. In return, the trees supply the fungi with food.

The partnership has big implications for forest health. In addition to being able to bring more to their tree buddies, the fungi functions as a sort of communications system between trees. Using mycelium, a healthy tree can send nutrients to a stressed tree an acre or two away, Cole said.

"This becomes extremely important in times of stress or drought or in timber practices like clear-cuts," she said. "(This network) allows trees to survive through harsh conditions that the tree, on its own, wouldn't be able to survive."

Mycelium can live for a few days or several hundred years, depending on where it's based and what it's growing in. Adaptable and quick to evolve, fungi can respond swiftly to changes in the ecosystem. Trees exist on a very different time scale than fungi and may not be able to react quickly to disease or stress, but, said Cole, "Their fungal partners can."

Photographer and reporter Colin Murphey contributed to this report.

Rentals: 'The Pandora's box is open, and you're not going to shut it.'

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County staff estimates the ordinance would impact at least 173 property owners in unincorporated areas who rent out homes for up to 30 days, nearly double the 2010 estimate for vacation rentals. The state does not regulate short-term rentals to ensure renters' health and safety as it does with hotels, motels and bed-and-breakfasts.

Commissioners held a work session Wednesday with County Manager Cameron Moore and County Counsel Heather Reynolds.

Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan handed out a memo with a list of items she would like included in the ordinance. Those items include septic and sewage requirements that match those in place in Gearhart, property inspection at least every three years — as opposed to the five-year requirement written in the most recent draft of the ordinance — and a distinction between types of short-term rentals.

"This ordinance is actually a great opportunity for us," Sullivan said. "Now we're moving toward digitizing our information on this, but also looking at the septic systems."

Commissioner Sarah Nebeker was leery of including additional regulations. Nebeker, a Gearhart resident, has been a vocal critic of the city's new regulations that will be up for a vote in November.

The ballot measure would repeal the regulations, require home inspections and place responsibility on owners to self-report issues. Nebeker and other supporters say the new regulations are too harsh and restrict property rights.

The commissioner said Wednesday that she supports regulations at the county level, but does not want them to be as "draconian" as those in Gearhart.

"If we put all the short-term rentals into one pocket and we make the restrictions onerous on everyone, I'm not supportive," Nebeker said.

Some commissioners also raised concerns about requiring inspections at least every three years, citing county staff time issues and the fact that inspections would cost roughly \$200. But Sullivan maintained the ordinance would be too ineffective if regular inspections are not

conducted.

"I don't think a \$200 inspection every few years is onerous," Sullivan said.

Commissioner Lianne Thompson agreed that septic inspections should be a priority and that a more efficient system for reporting issues must be created. She lives in Arch Cape, which already has established regulations, but the neighborhood she lives in opted out of them.

One short-term rental in her neighborhood is constantly overcrowded and she can smell the sewage from afar, she said. Other residents have told her that their complaints have not been adequately addressed by the county.

"This is a growing trend, in my experience, because I've tracked it," Thompson said.

Scott Lee, the board's chairman, and Moore said the ordinance is a necessary starting point and that more regulations could be added over time. Moore added that the county's potential regulations are much less restrictive than those in place in Gearhart.

"That's not a bad way to start in terms of policy," Moore said. "We can always tighten it up as we go."

Reynolds, the ordinance's author, will continue revising the document with input from commissioners. They agreed to bring the issue forward again after the outcome of the Gearhart ballot measure is determined.

County staff has discussed the issue since the summer of 2016, shortly after they first suspected that a home near Cullaby Lake caught fire due to unsafe conditions and lack of permits. They since have documented multiple complaints from renters. Commissioners were handed a draft of the ordinance in June, and Wednesday's work session was the third that commissioners have held about the topic this year.

All commissioners agreed Wednesday that vacation rentals — despite concerns about their effects on long-term housing and the culture of those who reside in the county full time — have become an inevitable factor in the county's future.

"The Pandora's box is open, and you're not going to shut it," Sullivan said. "The culture is changing."