

#TimberUnity: ‘The way it all started was absolutely pure,’ says one trucker

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Coast, a sign that many people in rural Oregon were waiting for an opportunity to be heard.

At the movement’s peak, Betsy Johnson — then a Democratic state senator representing the North Coast, now an independent candidate for governor — triumphantly held up a #TimberUnity sign at a rally outside the Oregon State Capitol.

But over the past few years, the movement has fractured. Gov. Kate Brown used an executive order to bypass the Legislature and implement a Climate Protection Program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. #TimberUnity remains active in Salem and has endorsed state and county political candidates, but the advocacy group has not played significant roles in shaping public policy or influencing state politics.

Like several original leaders, Leavy has split from the group, disillusioned by what the movement has become.

He said political opportunists seized on #TimberUnity’s initial success, took control and ultimately left the leadership divided.

“The way it all started was absolutely pure,” Leavy said.

‘I will not sit and watch another mill close’

Leavy said he learned about cap and trade from a neighbor while at a fuel pump. After researching the legislation, he called Shelly Gedenberg-Solum of Gedenberg Log Trucking.

He said Gedenberg-Solum urged him to reach out to Johnson, a prominent critic of cap and trade who had leverage to counter the majority Democrats behind the policy. After scheduling a meeting with the state senator in Salem, he said, “it went from 0 to 60.”

“It had to,” he said. “Because that was the only way to stop cap and trade.”

Leavy took to Facebook in June 2019 to announce he was going to organize a convoy to the Capitol.

“I can’t afford a day off ... but I can’t afford to lose an industry that my family depends on,” he wrote in the post. “That being said, a day off is better than a lifetime off with nothing to cut, nothing to yard, nothing to shovel log, no mills to haul to, no trucks (loaded) with finished product, no chip trucks hauling chips ... the list can go on and on in the timber industry!”

“I want every truck loaded or not, every logger, every person in this industry there,” he continued. “I will not sit and watch another mill close!”

The name #TimberUnity, which Leavy said he and his fiancée came up with while laying in bed, became central to the movement. He said Gedenberg-Solum designed the tree logo with an Astoria sign maker.

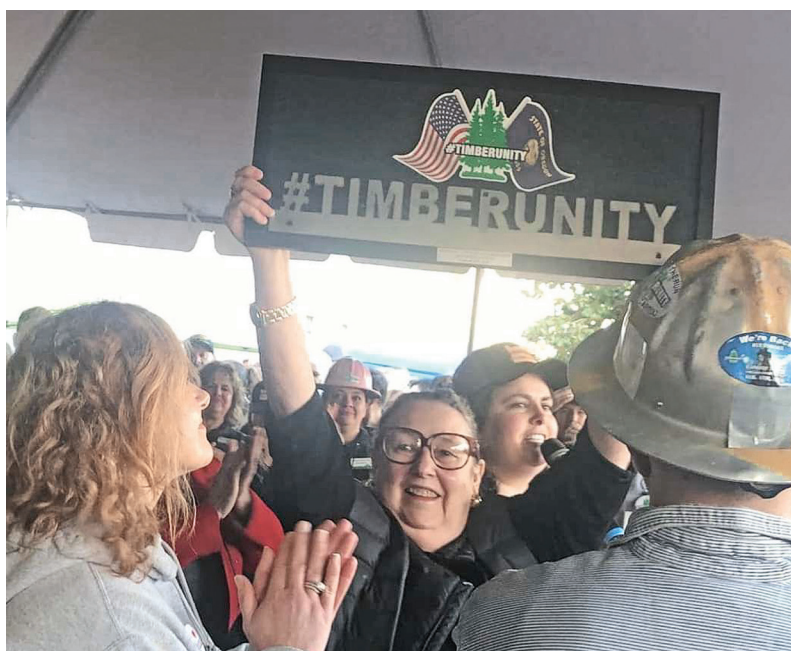
Leavy and others who were involved in the movement early on told The Astorian they felt like workers in rural pockets of the state finally had a voice and something to bond over.

But Leavy said #TimberUnity grew too fast and became



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Jeff Leavy and others who were involved with #TimberUnity early on said they felt like workers in rural pockets of the state finally had a voice.



Facebook

Betsy Johnson, then a state senator, appeared at a #TimberUnity rally in 2020.

untenable.

He said when he and others were approached by Julie Parrish, a former Republican state lawmaker from West Linn, and Lindsay Berschauer, who is now a Yamhill County commissioner, they followed the lead of the more experienced politicians.

Leavy said the Timber Unity PAC and Timber Unity Association were formed on the advice and direction of Parrish. Andrew Miller, the CEO of Stimson Lumber Co., provided \$5,000 in seed money to start the political action committee and was named director.

Leavy said #TimberUnity was registered as a trademark and was filed under the PAC. The funds were also added under the PAC. He said Parrish promised that once the association was formed, the trademark would be transferred. To him, it was important that the membership association have control as the political action committee was not central to their mission.

But that never happened. Leavy also believes he was

passed over as president of the association because of his past. While he wanted more control, he said he tried to accept the snub since he valued being part of the movement.

By October 2019, Leavy resigned from the #TimberUnity association board after growing increasingly angry and frustrated, but he remained a member.

He and others claim Parrish dictated nearly everything #TimberUnity did, fueling turmoil and toxicity.

“Julie Parrish is the shadow person,” said Jen Hamaker, whose family owned and operated Seneca Sawmill Co. in Eugene.

‘Some fundamental disagreements’

Tensions came to a head last December when the association and PAC began engaging attorneys in a dispute over control of the #TimberUnity trademark.

Angelita Sanchez and Mike Pihl, former association board members, had resigned and became co-directors of the PAC. Leavy was

elected by members as president of the association.

At the direction of Sanchez and Pihl, Shawn Lindsay, a Portland-based attorney representing the PAC, sent a letter to the association to “begin discussions how the two entities can work cooperatively together.”

Lindsay claimed the association focused mostly on disaster relief efforts and was largely inactive when it came to revenue generation and association membership activity.

The attorney said he would work with the association to formalize a trademark license agreement and included a list of provisional conditions.

Among the conditions, the association would have to agree to limit its efforts to supporting membership development and education on issues. The PAC would be the lead entity for supporting and endorsing political candidates and taking positions on ballot measures. Both entities could work together to co-plan rallies and legislative days, the letter said.

The association president would have to work collaboratively with the PAC directors on messaging related to public policy, the letter continued. Also, board members would have to refrain from posting “unfounded, defamatory commentary” about the PAC directors and past association board members.

John Roberts, a Eugene-based attorney representing the association, rejected the conditions. He listed a set of demands that included releasing the trademark and all associated property, social media, business and banking access to the association.

The association also demanded authority to appoint directors to the PAC, who would work in tandem with a steering committee comprised of three association board members and two association members.

Roberts noted, “there are some fundamental disagreements between our clients as to what has occurred that has brought matters to this point.” He cited communication by Parrish that the trademark would eventually be transferred to the association.

In late January, Lindsay responded with a letter demanding the association cease and desist from using the #TimberUnity trademark and similar names. The letter also demanded the association change its name with the Oregon Secretary of State’s Office and any other government filings.

Lindsay said any communication by Parrish that the trademark would eventually be transferred to the association was not binding and “merely broad statements of possible actions.”

Pihl, a Vernonia logger, served as co-director of the PAC for about a month. Since then, it has been led by Sanchez, a Sweet Home city councilor who owns a trucking company, and Marie Bowers, a grass seed farmer in Lane County.

Leavy and Hamaker claim Parrish hijacked #TimberUnity.

“To me, she took this away from the people,” Hamaker said. “She took our momentum away. She took something that we had never seen before in the state of Oregon.”

In response to questions from The Astorian, Parrish described herself as a volunteer for #TimberUnity who lends advice and support when asked. She praised the leadership of Sanchez and Bowers.

“Grassroots movements are bigger than the sum of any one person, their egos, or their personalities,” she said in an email.

Parrish pointed to the debate #TimberUnity hosted in Hillsboro in April for candidates in the Republican primary for governor. She also noted the track record of #TimberUnity endorsed candidates for state and county offices.

“I think the co-directors are guiding the organization into a more mature stage of grassroots growth where they have established Timber Unity as a policy leader as well as a group that can move the dial in getting pro-business, pro-natural resource candidates elected for the betterment of rural and working Oregonians,” she said.

Leavy, for his part, chose to rebrand. In February, he announced the association’s new name: Oregon Natural Resource Industries.

“Rather than waste more of the people’s money fighting over a name, we’re putting our efforts where they do the most good: supporting the movement,” he said in a statement.

Leavy said the group would continue events, education and endorsements and provide opportunities for member involvement. The Facebook group has since gained more than 10,000 members. Unlike the way #TimberUnity grew so quickly, he wants Oregon Natural Resource Industries to build slowly and methodically.

“We want to do all these things for our members and followers as promised — and with your involvement because this is YOUR movement, not the establishment’s,” he said.

Museum: Updates for accessibility happening over several months

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marketing manager, said part of the idea for the tours came from a day where museum staff simulated visual impairments by blindfolding themselves and taking a tour. Next, they want to experience the museum from the perspective of people in wheelchairs.

Triezenberg said it’s important to talk to specific communities about how to improve the museum, but experiences like these give staff some understanding.

“There’s a certain level of empathy that comes from doing these tours and actually feeling what it’s like to move your hand along the torpedo or changing the surface of the floor as you move from tile to carpet,” she said. The museum also recently received an Oregon Heritage Grant from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department to create a Spanish audio tour for

the Brix Maritime Hall and the U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Missions Gallery.

The museum will be working on completing the translations in the next nine months or so, Triezenberg said.

Wuebben said the museum has always had accessible features, like wheelchair lifts and a push-button entry at the front door. However, those features were not communicated well to the public.

“Putting that into under the heading of accessibility for people that are looking for those features, they now understand that we recognize what accessibility is,” she said.

Triezenberg said there are many ways businesses can make spaces more accessible without high-budget projects.

“You can do the little things or expand on what you already have at your place of business and make it a more accessible place for people,” she said.

School: Flexible education spaces are in the proposal

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Johnson recommended a flexible and versatile design throughout the property in order to address the highest number of goals and interests identified by stakeholders.

The classroom building is envisioned to house flexible education spaces, such as classrooms, workshops, meeting rooms or exhibition spaces. The building could feature a welcome center that can offer infor-

mation about the site, the city and surrounding area.

The gymnasium building is envisioned to be used as event flex space for functions ranging from large gatherings, exhibitions, performing arts, dinners, conferences and galas. When not used for events, the space could function as a public recreation center designed to accommodate uses ranging from basketball, pickleball, volleyball and a walking track.

A commercial kitchen

could also be added to the building and function as a teaching kitchen to support the food bank and others.

Johnson said there was a desire from stakeholders to use the property to host large public and private outdoor events and recreation while preserving nature.

The programming report outlined seven categories, including a plaza and bus stop, community garden, patio, recreational field, amphitheater and fire pit, riparian corridor and estu-

ary beach.

A recreation field could support a patio area for a farmers market, car show or an outdoor art exhibit.

Pedestrian trails and a foot bridge could connect the site to Ecola Creek Forest Reserve and Les Shirley Park.

The report presented several strategies to address parking, including additional on-site parking, a shuttle and enhanced walking and biking opportunities.

Girls: Program will teach self-confidence and safety

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said. The Harbor will assist people in reporting abuse if they choose, however.

“Their peers can empower each other to build this cohesive united front, especially during what’s happening nationally,” Aikman said.

In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June overturning Roe v. Wade, which had established a constitutional right to abortion, Aikman and

Lionheart want to see if teenagers are interested in talking about bodily autonomy and reproductive rights.

The group will also work on teaching girls how to build self-confidence instead of waiting for events like graduation or marriage to instill self-worth. “It’s like, actually, you’re enough right now,” Lionheart said. “You’re more than enough.”

Lionheart and Aikman especially want to talk about the difference between safe and unsafe relationships,

since there’s a lack of education for youth on how to set boundaries while dating.

Lionheart said it can be challenging for girls to become sexually active or interested in sex and not know where to ask questions and receive accurate

answers. Having a space where girls can talk and learn about consent and healthy relationships can help them stay safe.

“This is about helping create safety — helping end the cycle of abuse,” Lionheart said.

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