

HARNEY COUNTY STANDOFF: DAY 20

Bundy balks at FBI talks without media

By KEITH RIDLER Associated Press

BURNS — The leader of an armed group occupying a national wildlife refuge in Oregon met briefly with a federal agent Friday, but left because the agent wouldn't talk with him in front of the media.

The short meeting occurred as the standoff over federal land use policies stretches to the three-week mark and as Oregon officials are putting increased pressure on federal authorities to take action against Ammon Bundy's group.

Bundy arrived at the airport in Burns late Friday morning, where the FBI has set up a staging area. On Thursday, Bundy went to the airport and spoke to an FBI negotiator over the phone. They agreed to speak again Friday, but Bundy left shortly after he arrived because the FBI agent he spoke with said federal authorities wanted any conversation to be private.

Bundy wants face-to-face conversations in front of reporters.

"I really don't think, at this point, even having another phone conversation here without him would be beneficial," Bundy said before leaving.

He also questioned the FBI's authority.

"If you haven't got sanction from the sheriff, there's no reason to be talking to you," Bundy said.

A crowd of reporters



Ammon Bundy, right, shakes hand with a federal agent guarding the gate at the Burns Municipal Airport in Oregon on Friday.

watched the brief exchange, while state troopers and armed federal agents looked on.

Bundy's group began occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon on Jan. 2.

The FBI did not immediately comment on Friday's meeting with Bundy, but said in a statement Thursday their "response has been deliberate and measured as we seek a peaceful resolution."

On Wednesday, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she was angry because federal authorities have not taken action against Bundy's group,

which began occupying the refuge Jan 2. The Democratic governor said the occupation has cost Oregon taxpayers nearly half a million dollars.

Brown sent a letter Thursday to U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch and FBI Director James Comey, urging them "to end the unlawful occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge as safely and as quickly as possible."

In a statement Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley said it was "long past time for this illegal occupation to end and for the people of Harney County to get their lives back."

The Democrat said he

hope authorities could peacefully resolve the situation and hold Bundy's group accountable.

At community meetings, some local residents have asked Bundy and his group to leave. However Bundy has said he believes his group's work is appreciated by locals. He said the armed men have been "helping ranchers," doing maintenance on the refuge because "it's in a bad shape," and taking care of fire hazards in the refuge's fire house.

Bundy has also asked the FBI to let two ranchers sent to prison for arson go back home.

Hanford employee positive for radioactive contamination

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) — An employee at the Hanford Fire Station has tested positive for a very low level of internal radioactive contamination.

The Tri-City Herald reports that Department of Energy officials say the employee was exposed after breathing equipment used at the nuclear reservation's Plutonium Finishing Plant was sent to the station for storage.

More than 100 of the Hanford Fire Department's 150 workers have requested tests of their bodily fluid to

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see if they also may have been exposed.

DOE Richland Operations Office Chief of Staff Erik Olds says preliminary results from nine fire department employees have only yielded one positive result.

Officials say the worker with a preliminary positive result for internal contamination is not expected to face a significant health risk.

SeaPort postpones air service in Washington

PORT ANGELES, Wash. (AP) — A Portland-based airline has postponed planned air service in Washington state.

Seaport Airlines, which also services the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, said Thursday that it didn't know when it would resume service to Port Angeles, Seattle and Moses Lake. The airline blamed a pilot shortage that began last year and has affected its entire operation.

The Peninsula Daily News said that regularly scheduled air service from Port Angeles to Seattle-Tacoma Airport was set to begin March 1.

In October, the airline announced it would begin service between the cities with five flights. Kenmore Air ended service to Port Angeles in November 2014.

Governor outlines role for Oregon's next education chief

By BETSY HAMMOND The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Gov. Kate Brown wants her new "education innovation officer" to infuse Oregon schools with the expertise, support and drive they need to raise the state's woeful high school graduation rate.

That person, who has yet to be hired, will have the backing of the governor and the two key education agencies she oversees, the Oregon Department of Education and the Chief Education Officer.

But the graduation czar won't manage any staffers, won't have money to hand out and is expected to listen to Oregon school districts and communities, not order them around.

The governor's staff disclosed those details to The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday, fulfilling a month-old request for the new officer's job description. Brown announced in early December that she planned to add the position to her executive staff.

Just 72 percent of students in Oregon's class of 2014 earned a diploma in four years. That was the fourth-worst rate in the nation and represented no improvement from the previous year.

The state is scheduled to announce the new rate, for the class of 2015, on Thursday.

Brown has acknowledged the state's goal of getting 100 percent of students to graduate from high school or earn a GED by 2025 is far out of reach with less than 10 years to go. She expects the education innovation officer will help speed improvement toward that goal, set by then-Gov. John Kitzhaber and the Legislature in 2011.

Brown's office listed these main duties for her graduation czar:

- Finding the barriers that keep schools from graduating students — and looking for patterns affecting certain groups of students, including males, rural residents, blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, students with disabilities and students for whom English is a second language.

- Assemble the best findings from research, experts and groups with a track record of success.

- Get school districts and communities to see what strategies work and to use them.

- Recommend new state policies and ways of allocating money to raise graduation rates, particularly among students of color, who have the lowest success rates and represent a growing proportion of the state's population.

The governor's spokeswoman, Melissa Navas, said Brown aims to have the innovation officer in place sometime this spring. The salary range has not been determined, Navas said.

The top 30 employees on Kitzhaber's staff were paid an average of about \$110,000.

One item sure to be on the new officer's plate: Finding ways to decrease the chronic absenteeism that is the hallmark of so many Oregon schools, starting in kindergarten.

Oregon has been shown to have one of the nation's highest rates of students missing 10 percent of the school year or more. And so far it's not getting better, even after The Oregonian/OregonLive brought the issue to public attention in early 2014.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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