

It’s time for Western politicians to speak up

The silence is deafening. In Oregon, Washington and California the governors and most members of the congressional delegations have been silent on the crisis created by the poor management of federal lands in the West.

When the issue comes up, one will chirp about how there needs to be more “engagement” or some other sort of blather meant to divert the issue.

In fact, the level of engagement is clear. The federal government, with help and cooperation from the states and their leaders, is acre-by-acre taking over management of not just public lands but all lands in the West. The federal government owns 51 percent of the land in 11 Western states, and acts as though it owns the rest. With an agenda based on stopping farming, ranching, oil and gas exploration and mining, the federal agencies — the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Forest Service among them — have been methodically shutting down or dictating the circumstances under which farmers, ranchers and others who have built the Western economy for more than a century will be allowed to stay.

The northern spotted owl, the greater sage grouse, the gray wolf — the Mazama pocket gopher, for crying out loud — and hundreds of local “species” that need “protection” seem to be nothing more than a front to stop economic activities in the forests, fields and prairies across the West.

Yet, with one or two exceptions, we hear nothing from our governors, members of the U.S. Senate and members of the House of Representatives about this crisis. Rep. Greg Walden is a rare exception. The Oregon Republican has spoken about the oppression of the West on the floor of the House.

Oh, the others issue some press release or statement about the Bundy brothers and how they need to be kicked off the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County. As an aside, it looks to us like the FBI even fumbled the simple job of ending that siege, waiting for weeks and then killing one of the men during a traffic stop. Maybe they were sending a message to anyone else thinking of protesting, just like when a federal prosecutor charged ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond under a terrorism law that would put them in jail for five years for burning 139 federally owned acres to get rid of weeds.

But the real issue isn’t the Hammonds, the Bundys or the takeover of a couple of federal buildings in rural Oregon.

The real issue is right out the door of every rural resident. The real issue is what impact the federal and state governments will have on land you own, land you pay taxes on and land you love.

The real issue is whether any bureaucrat sitting in a wood-paneled office in Washington, D.C., has the right, or the moral authority, to tell a landowner what he, or she, can or can’t do.

We want to know why governors and U.S. senators who say they represent all of the people of Washington, Oregon and California are silent on such a fundamental issue in the West. We want to know why they bow and curtsy to their urban, environmentally conscious constituents — and others around the nation — and stiff arm their rural constituents.

Oh, they cook up ways to keep rural economies on life support after allowing the feds to shut down or curtail commercial logging, mining and ranching. They set up “programs” to take scrap wood and brush and convert it into “biofuel” and call it a “green” industry while the forests become overgrown and prone to disastrous fires and lumber mills are shut down, costing thousands of good-paying jobs. That would laughable if it weren’t so pitifully transparent.

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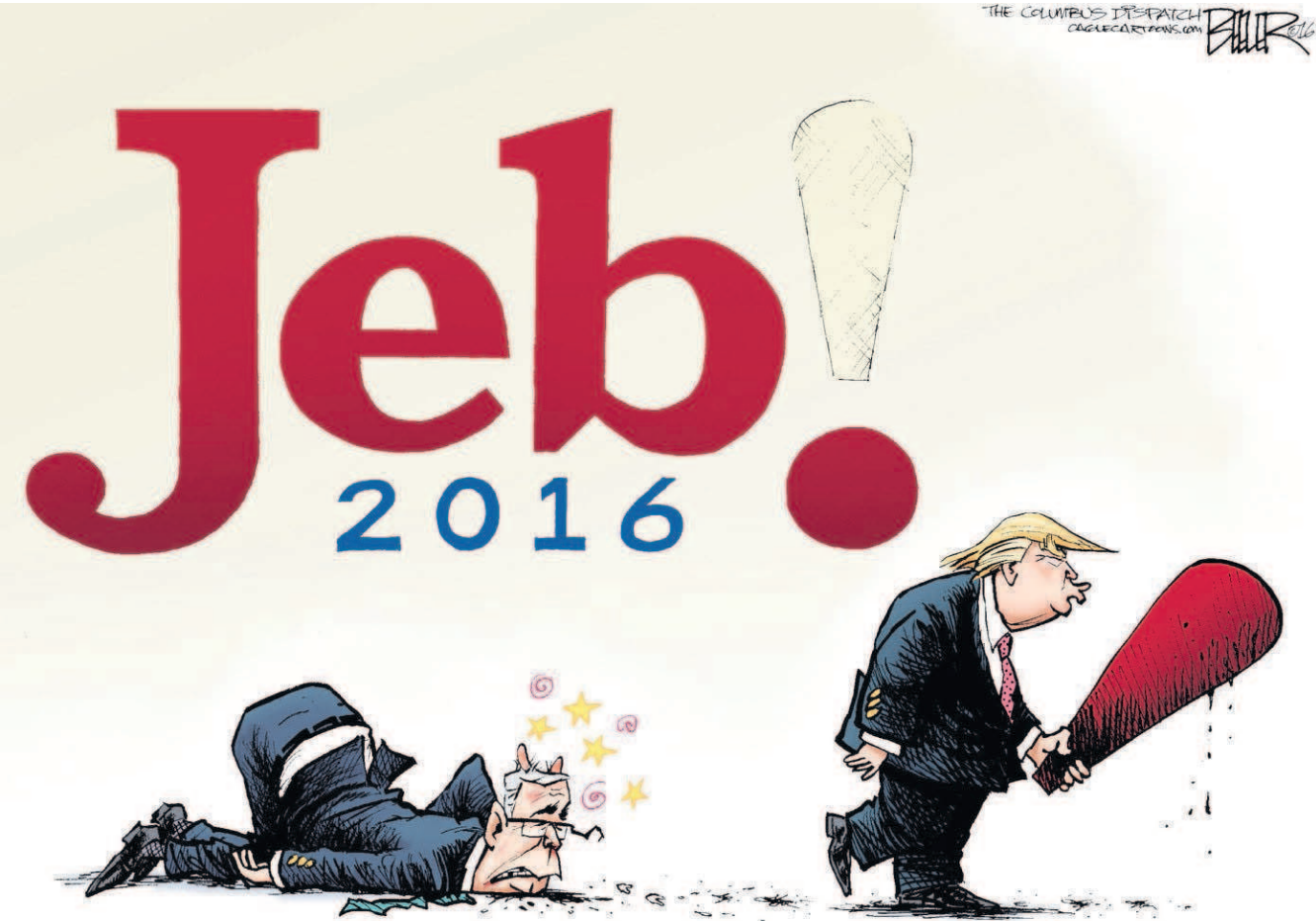
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In the end, nothing gained

For readers who might be interested in reviewing a detailed account of the 41-day siege of federal property that occurred Jan. 2 through Feb. 11, I recommend reading an article on Wikipedia entitled, “Occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.” It is not my purpose in this column to rehash those criminal activities, but rather to make some related remarks about the necessity for law and order in a nation founded on a constitutional form of government.

It is a misfortune for all Oregonians, for real veterans and for current members of our armed services that the occupiers of the refuge ever called themselves, “the Oregon Militia.” Hardly any of them had ever lived in Oregon, and most had no military background. But they certainly enjoyed playing army temporarily in Harney County at the expense of the local citizens there.

Their many offenses — which include trespassing, breaking and entering, refusing to cooperate with law enforcement officials, destruction of public and private property, grand theft auto, invasion of public and private computer files and violation of Native American artifacts — were all helpfully documented for prosecutors courtesy of the occupiers’ own social media communications.

While some residents of Harney or Wallowa counties might have felt sympathy for the alleged reasons for the occupation — including complaints about the sentencing of ranchers Dwight and



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

Steve Hammond and what some critics would claim is the mismanagement of federal lands — few people in Oregon ever supported the militarized, intimidating tactics of the group or their outright contempt for the law and for local authorities.

Within days of the beginning of the invasion, residents of Harney County made it clear at a public meeting that they wanted the protesters to leave. Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies exercised commendable restraint even after the occupiers refused to surrender, and even while onlookers like me seethed at how long it was taking the FBI to step in and put an end to their armed insurrection.

Ultimately, restraint proved to be the wiser course. When a convoy of occupiers was en route from Harney to Grant County to attend a meeting there on Jan. 26, they were stopped by a police blockade. FBI aerial footage shows that one occupier sped up and tried to swerve around the roadblock, and that driver nearly hit a police officer with his pickup.

Then after his truck got stuck in a snow bank, the driver exited the pickup,

moved toward the same officer, briefly raised his hands over his head, then quickly lowered them to his side while whirling at two officers on opposite sides of him. That protester, who had previously vowed not to be taken alive, was reaching for a gun when he was shot, according to the police. I will have no part in making a martyr or a folk hero of him by mentioning his name, and I scorn any deceitful glorification of his suicidal attempt to shoot a police officer.

Most of the protesters, including the Bundy brothers, who were the leaders of this misfit collection of outlaws, were arrested that day.

A few others surrendered right after that, but four more held out until Feb. 11, when the last one finally gave up. A bonus for the FBI came when Clive Bundy, the patriarch of the clan who engineered this series of seditious acts, was himself arrested in Portland for previous actions against law enforcement officials in Nevada in 2014.

Now all of these self-deluded rebels will get a hard lesson in what our constitution is really about. And some of them might be spending as long as 10 years at taxpayers’ expense in a public facility while they learn.

This will prove to be a much longer occupation than they had bargained for. And they have now surrendered their precious Second Amendment rights, along with many other freedoms as well.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Lands managers value cooperation

As employees of federal land agencies in Oregon, we are entrusted by Congress with the responsibility to help steward and manage federal lands for all Americans. This is a tremendous honor and responsibility we take seriously.

And we can’t do it alone. As public lands belong to all Americans, managing these lands is a collective effort. It is a privilege to work alongside local communities, partners, and the public to help achieve the long-term health, productivity, and protection of public lands.

Here in the Pacific Northwest, and across the country, our best work is accomplished by working with diverse partners and stakeholders — ranchers, environmentalists, sportsmen, local communities, schools, and private industries.

Though our agencies have different missions, we share a common goal of managing public lands in a cooperative manner with you, the people who own them.

The future management of public

GUEST EDITORIAL

Jamie Connell and Jim Peña

lands requires cooperation over confrontation. In Oregon and across the West, there are countless examples of collaborative groups working together to achieve positive results.

One recent shining example was the work accomplished across agencies, states, counties and ownership lines to create and implement land-use plans that avoided a listing of the sage-grouse as endangered.

Managing public lands is sometimes challenging. There are a variety of uses, interests, and opinions on how these



lands should be managed, and finding balance is not without challenges.

That is why it is crucial that we listen to each other, find common ground, and work together to find common-sense solutions. Individually and collectively, we are committed to these principles of listening, talking, and working together to achieve the greatest good. We strive for these things in good faith every day.

Public lands belong to all Americans — they are yours to enjoy and participate in their management. That’s one of the reasons public lands are so special.

We look forward to continuing our work with local citizens, communities and partners to manage public lands so we can ensure the special places we love can meet the needs of today and remain available for future generations to enjoy.

Jamie Connell is the acting State Director, Bureau of Land Management Oregon/Washington. Jim Peña is the Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Region.

Media following the wrong story

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Now that all the armed protesters are gone from Harney County, many of which are in jail, one would think the siege is over. Steve and Dwight Hammond are in Federal prison convicted as terrorists for starting two fires, the first of which improved BLM property and the second of which saved the Hammond ranch. The BLM will confiscate the Hammond ranch when the women will not be able to pay the \$400,000 fine. The 200-plus FBI agents and other armed agents that had no insignias that manned road blocks and interrogated American citizens can go home. The siege is over. Right?

C.J. Hadley, editor of Range Magazine, Spring 2016 issue, documents an intentional conspiracy on the part of the government to deprive Western ranchers of their property rights. In Hage v. United States (2010), Judge Robert C. Jones found a “literal intentional conspiracy to deprive the Hages not only of their per-

mits, but also their vested water rights. This behavior shocks the conscience of the court.” The government has yet to pay the Hages the \$14,000,000 fine.

Many Americans, myself included, do not agree with the armed takeover. However, whether we agree with protester methods never was the issue in Burns. Our Pledge of Allegiance ends with “liberty and justice for all.” If justice and liberty are denied to the Hammonds, then justice has been denied to all. These protesters are Americans. Most have families. Many are veterans. They have sacrificed their liberty and freedom to stand against injustice and government oppression. According to witnesses present, Lavoy Finicum was shot multiple times with his hands up, attempting to surrender. Who exercised restraint and

who exercised violence in Burns? Why has the press never documented that uranium is the real issue with the Hammond ranch? A 1956 Department of Geology Mineral Industries study (Vol. 18, No. 12 by Max Shafer) “documents occurrence of secondary uranium mineralization ... in Harney Co.” In September 2011 Uranium officials met with Burns officials. The Jan. 8, 2012 edition of The Oregonian documents: “Oregon Energy LLC hopes to mine 18 million pounds of Yellowcake uranium” near Burns. The New York Times in April 2015 documented under the Hillary Clinton State Department that the United States “gave the Russians control of one-fifth of all uranium production capacity” in America. The same article documents that the Clinton Foundation received millions in contributions from Uranium companies. Who are the real terrorists?

Stuart Dick
Irrigon