

Timber Unity movement gets presidential invite

By Aubrey Wieber and Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

Two members of a quickly rising political activist community of Oregon loggers have been invited to the White House to attend a speech on “America’s environmental leadership” on Monday, July 8, by President Donald Trump.

Timber Unity, a group comprised mostly of loggers but also truckers, farmers and other Oregonians opposed to a carbon-regulating program proposed by Oregon lawmakers, posted the invitation on their Facebook page Tuesday night.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the post had been shared more than 3,000 times and received more than 1,000 comments.

A White House official confirmed the invitation to the Oregon Capital Bureau Wednesday.

Timber Unity organizers Marie Bowers, a farmer from Coburg, and Todd Stoffel, a log truck driver from Washougal, Washington, will be representing the group at Monday’s event. Stoffel grew up in Monroe, and half the business of his company, GT Stoffel Trucking, is in Oregon, he said.

Stoffel said he didn’t know what the event would

entail, or who else would be there, but he’s looking forward to the trip.

“We have an opportunity to let the voice of rural America be heard,” Stoffel said.

The Timber Unity Facebook page created its first post June 21, and already has more than 47,000 members.

Those behind the group were chief organizers of a large rally at the Capitol last Thursday, June 27, protesting House Bill 2020, which would have capped the state’s greenhouse gas emissions.

Bowers said she got word from a political friend during the rally that the White House was watching what was happening in Oregon. She announced it to the crowd, which erupted with applause.

Bowers said the White House reached out to Nick Smith, executive director for Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a logging-friendly nonprofit that started in Roseburg, during the rally. The White House asked Smith who from Oregon should attend the event, and he said Timber Unity, Bowers said.

Bowers was told of the invitation after the rally, and got the official invitation Tuesday.

The cap and trade proposal, which prompted Senate Republicans to avoid the Senate for nine days in protest late last month to prevent a vote on it, died at the end of the legislative session.

Stoffel said many have been surprised at how Timber Unity took off, but he said there are parallels to the national uprising of rural, working-class Amer-

‘THE RURAL PARTS OF THIS COUNTRY HAVE BEEN IGNORED FOR YEARS. THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ARE TIRED OF THE SAME OLD, SAME OLD.’

Todd Stoffel, a log truck driver from Washougal, Washington

icans who have become more vocal since Trump took office.

“A couple guys had an idea and they created a Facebook page. It’s been word of mouth from there,” Stoffel said. “This is a voice for rural Oregon, rural America, that we’re tired of being steamrolled, which is what a lot of the policies seem to do for us. The stuff that’s passed is about the big cities, especially in Oregon. There are other parts of the state of Oregon other than just Portland.”

The Timber Unity movement casts itself as purely grassroots, according to several Republican lawmakers and protesters.

However, they are in part financed by Stimson Lumber CEO Andrew Miller, a frequent GOP donor who is prominent on the Timber Unity Facebook page and has a letter explaining his \$5,000 seed donation on their website.

Stoffel said he didn’t know what their current funding level is. Its political action committee shows \$31,457, according to state campaign finance records.

A GoFundMe campaign that popped up when the committee saw the need was there, and that he and Barreto promoted the idea as a pilot project showing what a small community can do when they work together and come to the state to have it help fulfill its dream.

Stoffel said Timber Unity shut down the GoFundMe as organizers learned it didn’t com-

ply with state requirements to report political spending and contributions.

Timber Unity’s website shows its organizers as three truckers: Jeff Leavy, Adam Lardy and Scott Hileman.

The White House invitation is the apparent culmination of several weeks of national attention on the Republican walkout, which was picked up by outlets from the New York Times to Vice to Fox News.

Stoffel said issue is rural versus urban, Republican versus Democrat.

He said Democrats at the Legislature “snubbed their noses” at loggers and truckers who wanted to understand the bill. Republicans embraced them, he said.

“The rural parts of this country have been ignored for years,” Stoffel said, adding Trump’s election proves that. “The majority of Americans are tired of the same old, same old.”

Stoffel said he understands the majority of voters put Democrats who ran on cap and trade in office, but said that’s because rural voters have routinely been pushed down. They stay home because they know they will be “steamrolled” by the Democratic agenda, he said.

Democrats and environmentalists pushing climate

legislation said House Bill 2020 was tailored to protect rural Oregon, driving dollars from the cities to projects in rural communities.

Stoffel said that could be true, and many might be misunderstanding the bill, but if so, that’s on Democratic lawmakers for not taking the time to clearly explain it.

“If you read the bill and you read all the legal jargon, the normal person cannot figure out what they are saying,” he said. “When we were in the House and Senate chambers, they read so fast and push everything so fast, that you can’t understand what’s going on.”

Stoffel said the invitation shows rural voices in Oregon and other states across the country are being heard. He said it could add momentum to Timber Unity’s already skyrocketing profile, and he might even get a chance to talk policy with the president.

Stoffel said some in Timber Unity have been hurt by Trump’s trade war with China, resulting in higher tariffs.

“There is not a perfect one-size-fits-all policy with any administration,” he said. “Yes, there are some that have hurt our industry. I may have an opportunity to bring that up with him.”

Hansell instrumental in funding for one-stop health center

Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Oregon Sen. Bill Hansell is earning his paycheck. The Dist. 29 senator has been hard at work getting a “one-stop” community health center ramrodded through the state legislature and to the governor’s desk. The “one-stop” moniker aptly describes how the projected center that would offer all-around services, including mental health, substance abuse, veterans services and public health services as well.

Hansell said that the project funding came through the auspices of the legislature’s Capital Construction Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Joint Ways and Means Committee. He added

that the project has been in the making for several years. The senator was working with Dist. 58 representative, Greg Barreto on a health clinic project at the request of his Elgin constituents when he was also contacted by people in the city of Enterprise with a similar request.

Hansell told the Enterprise constituents that he would start on their project after funding was secured for the Elgin project.

“They understood and waited,” Hansell said. “We made it one of our top priorities and began to work the process.”

While there was virtually no legislative opposition to the project, Hansell said the major roadblock to getting funding approved

for the center was simply the amount of requested projects versus the limited amount of funds available.

“They’re (the Capital Construction Committee) looking for things like community involvement — ‘Do you have skin in the game, what will be accomplished by it?’” Hansell said. He added that other considerations included project location and community benefits. He also said that the committee is very similar to a grant board and rigorously examines applications. Wallowa County’s passed with flying colors.

“It was a real team effort,” Hansell said. “My hat is off to the Wallowa community and the different folks working on the boards, the local fund-

raising that was done and the commitment of the community to this project was just outstanding. They raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to match the state funds.”

The senator noted that the committee saw the need was there, and that he and Barreto promoted the idea as a pilot project showing what a small community can do when they work together and come to the state to have it help fulfill its dream.

According to Hansell, state senator of Dist. 17, Dr. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, a Democrat, was instrumental in helping get funding for the project. She even visited Wallowa County with the senator to familiarize herself with the project and meet its key players. At the time,

neither senator realized that Sen. Hayward would later be appointed as co-chair of the Ways and Means Committee.

“She saw the project, and understood how helpful it would be and important it was and she was an early supporter of it,” Hansell said. Hayward originally offered to co-sponsor the project but had to retract after being appointed the committee co-chair.

“She didn’t feel it was

right for her to be a co-sponsor of legislation she would be trying to get funding for,” Hansell said. “I appreciated her integrity on this.”

“It was a great idea for a community project, and we were successful in getting it done,” Hansell said. “There was great leadership locally, and they just helped me to help them. We were a team from start to finish, and it was an honor for me to be part of it.”

Combat veterans more likely to experience mental health issues

Michelle Klampe
Oregon State University

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Military veterans exposed to combat were more likely to exhibit signs of depression and anxiety in later life than veterans who had not seen combat, a new study from Oregon State University shows.

The findings suggest that military service, and particularly combat experience, is a hidden variable in research on aging, said Carolyn Aldwin, director of the Center for Healthy Aging Research in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at OSU and one of the study’s authors.

“There are a lot of factors of aging that can impact mental health in late life, but there is something about having been a combat veteran that is especially important,” Aldwin said.

The findings were published recently in the journal Psychology and Aging. The first author is Hyunyup Lee, who conducted the research as a doctoral student at OSU; co-authors are Soyoun Choun of OSU and Avron Spiro III of Boston University and the VA Boston Healthcare System. The research was funded by the National Institutes on Aging and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

There is little existing research that examines the effects of combat exposure on aging and in particular on the impacts of combat on mental health in late life, Aldwin said. Many aging studies ask about participants’ status as veterans, but don’t unpack that further to look at differences between those who were exposed to combat and those who weren’t.

Using data from the Veterans Affairs Normative Aging Study, a longitudinal study that began in the 1960s to investigate aging in initially healthy men, the researchers explored the relationship between combat exposure and depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as self-rated health and stressful life events.

They found that increased rates of mental health symptoms in late life were found only among combat veterans. The increases were not seen in veterans who had not been exposed to combat.

Generally, mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety tend to decrease or remain stable during adulthood but can increase in later life. The researchers found that combat exposure has a unique impact on that trajectory,

independent of other health issues or stressful life events.

“In late life, it’s pretty normal to do a life review,” Aldwin said. “For combat veterans, that review of life experiences and losses may have more of an impact on their mental health. They may need help to see meaning in their service and not just dwell on the horrors of war.”

Veterans’ homecoming experience may also color how they view their service later in life, Aldwin said. Welcoming veterans home and focusing on reintegration could help to reduce the mental toll of their service over time.

Most of the veterans in the study served in World War II or Korea. Additional research is needed to understand more about how veterans’ experiences may vary from war to war, Aldwin said.

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-Enterprise Mom

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