

Trump pardon of Oregon ranchers leaves some concerned, others jubilant

By **ANDREW SELSKY and JILL COLVIN**
Associated Press

SALEM (AP)—Two imprisoned ranchers who were convicted in 2012 of intentionally setting fires on public land in Oregon will be freed after President Donald Trump pardoned them on Tuesday.

The move by Trump raised concerns that others would be encouraged to actively oppose federal control of public land.

The imprisonment of Dwight and Steven Hammond prompted the armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016, led by two sons of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy.

Jamie Rappaport Clark, president of the group Defenders of Wildlife, noted that the Hammonds were

convicted of arson, a serious crime.

“Whatever prompted President Trump to pardon them, we hope that it is not seen as an encouragement to those who might use violence to seize federal property and threaten federal employees in the West,” Clark said.

The dozens of armed people who occupied the refuge near the Hammond ranch for 41 days said the Hammonds were victims of federal overreach. They changed the refuge’s name to the Harney County Resource Center, reflecting their belief that the federal government has only a limited right to own property within a state.

Bundy and his sons Ammon and Ryan faced trial themselves after an armed standoff at their Nevada ranch in 2014 that was sparked by land-grazing fees.

A federal judge in January dismissed the charges against them.

Cliven Bundy said he was glad Trump pardoned the Hammonds.

“Finally, an elected official did something,” Bundy said. “He can’t give them back their life. They’re going to go back to ranching and put their lives together the best they can.”

The Hammonds were being held at a federal detention center south of Los Angeles. It wasn’t immediately clear when they’d be released.

The Hammond family, well-known in eastern Oregon, had been embroiled for years in a legal dispute over several fires that damaged federal property.

Dwight and his son Steven Hammond were convicted of arson and faced a manda-

tory minimum sentence of five years, mandated by the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.

U.S. District Judge Michael R. Hogan said such a lengthy sentence “would not meet any idea I have of justice, proportionality ... it would be a sentence which would shock the conscience to me.”

Hogan instead sentenced Dwight Hammond to three months in prison and Steven Hammond to a year and one day. However, in October 2015, a federal appeals court ordered them to be resentenced to the mandatory minimum.

In a statement Tuesday, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders called that decision “unjust.”

“The Hammonds are devoted family men, respected contributors to their local community, and have widespread

support from their neighbors, local law enforcement, and farmers and ranchers across the West,” she said. “Justice is overdue for Dwight and Steven Hammond, both of whom are entirely deserving of these Grants of Executive Clemency.”

The occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge ended shortly after occupier LaVoy Finicum was shot to death by Oregon State Police at a roadblock and Ammon and Ryan Bundy were arrested.

The brothers and five other defendants were acquitted in 2016 by a federal court jury in Portland on charges stemming from the takeover.

Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden of Oregon, who lobbied the White House for the pardon of the Hammonds, said Trump’s decision was “a win for justice, and an ac-

knowledge of our unique way of life in the high desert, rural West.”

The pardons are the latest in a growing list of clemency actions by Trump. He has said he’s considering thousands of other cases—famous and not.

Aides say Trump has been especially drawn to cases in which he believes the prosecution may have been politically motivated—a situation that may reflect his own position at the center of the ongoing special counsel investigation into election meddling by Russia.

Many people believe the president is sending a signal to former aides and associates caught up in the probe.

Colvin reported from Washington. Zeke Miller contributed to this report from Washington.

Kavanaugh returns to Capitol Hill for round of meetings

By **Lisa Mascaro and Matthew Daly**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh returned to Capitol Hill Wednesday for a whirlwind round of meetings with key Republican senators as Democrats ramped up efforts to block his confirmation.

Kavanaugh, the conservative appellate court judge President Donald Trump chose to replace

retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy, met separately with Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, who called the judge “a very fine man,” and was to confer with Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and other senators.

At Hatch’s office in the Capitol, the senator told reporters he expects Kavanaugh’s confirmation to go well.

“There will be the usual attempts to sully his reputation not only in

the Senate but outside the Senate, but he’ll be able to handle it and I have every confidence he’ll be confirmed,” Hatch said.

Hatch, who had conferred with Trump on the nominee, praised the president’s choice. “I have no doubt he is going to be a great justice,” he said.

Democrats, as the Senate minority, have few options to block Kavanaugh. But they warn that confirming him will tilt the court

rightward, potentially rolling back women’s access to abortion and undoing aspects of the Affordable Care Act.

Democrats are also raising red flags over Kavanaugh’s writings that suggest investigations of sitting presidents are a distraction to executive branch leadership. They see that as concerning amid the ongoing special counsel probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

“The American people should have their eyes wide open to these stakes,” said Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., the minority leader.

Both sides have begun airing ads gearing up for a long summer confirmation battle that will stretch into fall. Republicans hope to have Kavanaugh confirmed by the start of the court’s session in October, and before the midterm election.

No date has been set for confirmation hearings.

5J BOARD

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- The number in favor and those opposed to supporting a \$48 million bond measure to fund District improvements were split nearly evenly, with 43 percent in favor and 41 percent opposed. Sixteen percent were unsure.

- Those who favored the plan cited mainly these reasons: “need updates,” “always support schools,” and “it’s necessary.”

- The main reasons for opposing the plans were: “taxes are already too high,” “asking too much money,” and “unnecessary.”

As survey respondents were provided more information during the interviews, they were asked to rank construction projects that might be included in a bond measure and rate them on a scale of one to four, with four being highest priority. Those results showed:

- Safety and security upgrades and energy improvements at Keating and Haines elementary schools at a cost of \$1 million were rated high priority by 59 percent of the respondents; 31 percent said that was a low priority; and 10 percent were not sure.

- Fifty-two percent ranked as high priority the plan to convert the existing high school into a school for students in

Grades 7-12 at a cost of \$10 million, 40 percent said that was a low priority and 8 percent were not sure.

- 46 percent rated the plan to build a single new elementary school for Grades 1-6 on district-owned property north of the high school at a cost of \$37 million as high priority, 48 percent rated it low priority and 7 percent were not sure.

- Remodeling Brooklyn Primary School for use as an Early Childhood Learning Center at a cost of about \$2.5 million was rated a high priority by 40 percent of the respondents, low priority by 52 percent and 7 percent were not sure.

More than half of those responding opposed a plan to spend \$4 million to renovate the Baker High School stadium and athletic fields, the report stated. Fifty-five percent were opposed and 33 percent were in favor, 12 percent were not sure.

Witty said the Board is working with community members to consider other ways to fund those improvements outside the bond measure funding.

Repondents also gave high support for the bond measure when they learned that it would help provide more vocational programs and instruction in science, engineering and technology for middle

school students. That information boosted those in favor to 62 percent, with 30 percent opposed and 8 percent not sure.

Another 66 percent agreed with the statement that they would support moving seventh- and eighth-graders to the high school so they could have access to “vocational, technical and accelerated programs.” Just 23 percent disagreed with that statement and 11 percent were not sure.

Replacing heating and air conditioning systems to save operating costs also boosted support for the bond measure to 60 percent in favor, 31 percent opposed and 9 percent not sure.

On the issue of how much the bond would cost individuals through increases in their property taxes, the report also pointed out that “respondents appear to be struggling with the cost at \$1.97 per thousand (of assessed property value).”

Survey results showed 46 percent agreed with this statement: “My property taxes are already too high. I can’t afford a \$1.97 per thousand increase in my current school district property tax rate. I am voting no.” Another 43 percent disagreed with the statement and 11 percent were not sure.

The Nelson Report summary concluded with

a recommendation for the District, if it decides to move forward with the bond measure, to present a “clear, disciplined and concise strategy” to communicate plans to its patrons.

The report also urged the District to emphasize the components the community highly values of districtwide safety and security improvements, enhanced vocational/career/technical opportunities for middle school students and energy improvement that will bring a significant cost savings.

In a response to a question from Cassidy about the best time to schedule a vote on the bond issue, Connie Porter, a communications consultant who contracts with the Oregon School Boards Association, said timing isn’t necessarily the issue.

“It really just depends on whether people care about an issue, how soon you can educate people to the need and how urgently you can convince them that there is a problem,” she said. “The bottom line is you really just need to make sure your voters understand the problem.”

Witty urged the Board members to review the survey summary as they move toward deciding whether to seek approval of the bond measure in November. The Board is scheduled to make that decision when it meets on

July 26.

“This survey doesn’t indicate a pathway of sure success,” Witty said. “What it does, though, is indicate there is an opportunity for success, but it will take quite a bit of effort around education.”

Witty noted that he and other District representatives have made more than 100 presentations in the community trying to provide information about the District’s proposal.

“This is what you were actually hired for,” Bryan told Witty. “We’re coming out of a 40-year history of lack of trust in the District and we were looking for ways to change that environment.”

“We’re on the cusp of it,” Bryan said. “Bond or no bond, this is a success. It sets a different stage for education in this community.”

Porter provided information about how a political action committee (PAC) will work to continue providing information about the vote, if the Board decides to put the issue on the ballot.

Information aimed at persuading voters to approve the measure must be left to the PAC, she said.

Kim Mosier, a com-

munity member who also has been involved in the process since it began, said she will head the PAC if the process goes forward.

Porter noted that the School District can provide factual information and anyone, other than Witty, can be a part of the PAC, including staff and board members.

Staff members must advocate for the bond measure on their off hours.

“The general perception is that the superintendent works 24 hours a day,” she said. “Mark will have a limited role once the board decides to go forward. His role is to be the provider of information.”

Again, Porter emphasized the importance of helping District voters understand the needs.

“Also, if they feel good about the District, they are more likely to support it and I think you’re off to a very good start,” she said.

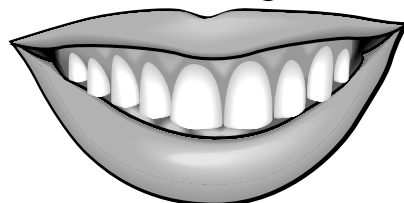
A volatile construction market with prices increasing rapidly at this time, along with possible rising interest rates and uncertainty in the bond market are other challenges the District will be faced with along the way, Scott Rogers of the Wenaha Group, told the Board.

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