

Klamath County farmers gather to protest water shutoff

KLAMATH FALLS (AP) — Farmers were driving tractors and other agriculture equipment from Merrill to Midland in southern Oregon Friday to express frustration about a meager water season facing irrigators this year.

Hundreds were expected to attend the “Shut Down and Fed Up” tractor rally in Midland, spokesperson Molly Jenkins told the Capital Press. Photos of tractors lining up in Merrill Friday morning displayed signs with slogans such as “Food grows where water flows,” the Herald and News reported.

The tractor convoy is traveling through Klamath Falls and will culminate in a rally with U.S. Rep. Greg Walden among the speakers.

Tulelake farmer and an event organizer Scott Seus said the event is a way to allow irrigators to release anger after they were told of an early shutoff of irrigation water after many had already planted crops.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which determines water allocation for the Klamath Project according to the biological opinion, told irrigators in

April that they would receive 140,000 acre-feet of water for farming. Many planted crops accordingly, knowing their water usage would be much lower than half of a full 350,000 acre-foot allocation.

After the Natural Resources Conservation Service released a dry May 1 forecast, with many crops in the ground, it became clear that that amount would likely be reduced to 80,000 acre-feet. Of that, 55,000 acre-feet was left as of May 10. That amount of irrigation water will run out around July 1.

“We’re all in shock over here trying to figure out how to deal with it,” Seus said. “At every moment, we are trying to deal with this crisis and how to avert in any way, shape or form.”

Convoy and rally organizers are trying to attract the attention of President Donald Trump.

“I hope that we have his attention, and if we don’t, I hope that we gain it,” Seus said. “I would hope that his administration would try to find ways to find lasting solutions.”

Portland mayor asks governor to call in Oregon National Guard

By Gillian Flaccus
Associated Press

PORTLAND — The mayor of Portland, and Oregon’s federal prosecutor, asked Gov. Kate Brown on Monday to call up the Oregon National Guard to help police in the state’s largest city with protests that have spun into violence for three consecutive nights.

Mayor Ted Wheeler said at a news conference that Brown had declined to call up the National Guard on Sunday, instead opting for more involvement by the Oregon State Police. But when asked, Wheeler said he agreed with a call by U.S. Attorney for Oregon Billy J. Williams to bring National Guard troops to the city to guard infrastructure such as federal courthouses and police offices.

“What I saw at the Justice Center ... was sickening. This has to stop and in order for that to happen in the city of Portland, we need help,” Williams said. “We need bodies, we need more numbers to do something to stop this ridiculous violence. This just cannot keep up.”

Brown’s office did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Portland remains under a curfew order that takes effect at 8 p.m. nightly, but police did not stop several thousand protesters who violated the order late Sunday, in part because the crowd was so large, said Deputy Chief Chris Davis.

Police arrested 12 adults during protests Sunday and early Monday morning after authorities said projectiles — including “large, industrial grade mortar-type fireworks” — were thrown at officers as demonstrations over the killing of George Floyd continued in Oregon’s largest city. Two juveniles were also detained.

The violence came after thousands of protesters held a largely peaceful demonstration outside the Multnomah County Justice Center in downtown Portland. At one point, some police officers took a knee with protesters and three people in the crowd had a private talk with Police Chief Jami Resch, authorities said.

“We saw people at their very

worst and we saw people at their very best,” said Davis, who thanked protesters who remained peaceful. “Our strategy last night was to make sure that whatever happened, the police bureau was not the cause and so we decided to give them a greater space and give them the time to express themselves.”

Police said protesters smashed windows at the federal courthouse and through loud-speakers authorities declared the late-night gathering a civil disturbance.

The Multnomah County GOP criticized the police response in a statement on Monday, saying the Portland Police Bureau and Wheeler were being too easy on protesters and should not have allowed them to violate the curfew order without consequences.

“After all of Portland’s experience with mass protests, can the police really be so incompetent as to fail to encircle these crowds and arrest them all? Of course not. This is a deliberate policy choice to promoting further disorder,” said Chairman James Buchal.

RALLY

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By noon, protesters all wearing surgical or cloth masks were taping posters to about 20 vehicles sitting in the parking lot at the corner of North First Place and Locust Avenue. Signs included “Thank you farm workers!” and “We are wearing masks for you, not us!” One vehicle sported a “Black Lives Matter” sign.

Organizer Diedre Torres said before the parade of vehicles departed that she was going to take them on a route through town that avoided the other rally.

“I’m just trying to concentrate on what we’re doing,” she said.

Luz Reyes said she was participating because she has friends who are farm workers and she is concerned about their safety. She said she

wanted to make a statement for safe working conditions, living wages and job security.

“Being an essential worker, especially in an unsafe environment, especially not knowing what workload to expect, can be difficult,” she said.

Hermiston City Councilors Manuel Gutierrez and Roy Barron were present at the Essential not Sacrificial event. Gutierrez said he wanted to show his support for essential workers in Hermiston and their desires to stay safe from COVID-19.

“I don’t want to bring the disease to my family,” he said, noting that he is also of a high-risk age.

The essential workers protest avoided any direct confrontation with the “Hermiston Freedom Rally,” though others opted not to stay away.

During a few of the speakers on Saturday, a young black man stood holding a bright green sign with an expletive message written in sharpie directed at President Donald Trump, while rallygoers tried to block it from view using American flags.

Hodges said he was asked to make the man leave the rally but that he wanted to welcome those who opposed them.

“Perfect, that’s what it should be,” Hodges said. “Stand up for your beliefs while we stand for ours.”

Other speakers included Rob Lovett, president of the Greater Hermiston Area Tea Party, Rob Taylor, a Second Amendment activist from Coos County, Jonathan Lopez, former candidate for Umatilla County commissioner, and Mark Hodges, Colin’s father and former head coach of the Hermiston High

School football team.

“I think they did a good job of assembling people with different points of view,” said Steven Cranston, who attended Saturday’s rally with his family and said he wasn’t concerned about the risks of COVID-19.

While the rally was explicitly advertised as apolitical, it also featured tables and petitions for the newest initiative to recall Gov. Kate Brown, a movement that multiple speakers voiced support for on Saturday.

Some speakers delved into topics like abortion and vaccinations, while others directly accused Democratic leaders of deliberately implementing the “lockdown” to harm people. During his speech, Mark Hodges called public health officials doing contact tracing “murderous mercenaries.”

Though he said he’d prefer to foster an environment more akin to an “academic forum” rather than the “pep rally” atmosphere that developed Saturday, Colin Hodges felt the speakers stayed on track.

“They were more just so about freedom and about the government sort of encroaching on those freedoms and what we should do about it,” he said. “I think that was pretty consistent.”

Hodges also led the rally though prayer both to start and conclude the rally and made faith and religion a central tenet of Saturday’s message.

After organizing and coordinating his first rally, Hodges said he’s determined to do more and has targeted the Fourth of July as the next potential date for another rally in the area.




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