

## TODAY

Today is Monday, Feb. 15, the 46th day of 2021. There are 319 days left in the year. This is Presidents Day.

## Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 15, 1989, the Soviet Union announced that the last of its troops had left Afghanistan, after more than nine years of military intervention.

In 1564, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa.

In 1764, the site of present-day St. Louis was established by Pierre Laclède and Auguste Chouteau.

In 1798, a feud between two members of the U.S. House of Representatives (meeting in Philadelphia) boiled over as Roger Griswold of Connecticut used a cane to attack Vermont's Matthew Lyon, who defended himself with a set of tongs.

In 1879, President Rutherford B. Hayes signed a bill allowing female attorneys to argue cases before the Supreme Court.

In 1898, the U.S. battleship Maine mysteriously blew up in Havana Harbor, killing more than 260 crew members and bringing the United States closer to war with Spain.

In 1933, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt escaped an assassination attempt in Miami that mortally wounded Chicago Mayor Anton J. Cermak.

In 1944, Allied bombers destroyed the monastery atop Monte Cassino in Italy.

In 1961, 73 people, including an 18-member U.S. figure skating team en route to the World Championships in Czechoslovakia, were killed in the crash of a Sabena Airlines Boeing 707 in Belgium.

In 1992, a Milwaukee jury found that Jeffrey Dahmer was sane when he killed and mutilated 15 men and boys.

In 2004, Dale Earnhardt Jr. won the Daytona 500 on the same track where his father was killed three years earlier.

In 2005, defrocked priest Paul Shanley was sentenced in Boston to 12 to 15 years in prison on child rape charges.

In 2018, the last of the bodies of the 17 victims of a school shooting in Florida were removed from the building after authorities analyzed the crime scene; 13 wounded survivors were still hospitalized.

**Ten years ago:** Protesters swarmed Wisconsin's capitol after Gov. Scott Walker proposed cutbacks in benefits and abolishing bargaining rights for most public employees. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was ordered to stand trial on charges he'd paid a 17-year-old Moroccan girl for sex and then used his influence to cover it up.

**Five years ago:** President Barack Obama opened a meeting in Rancho Mirage, California, of leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, calling the landmark gathering on U.S. soil a reflection of his personal commitment to an enduring partnership with the diverse group of countries.

**One year ago:** The U.S. government said Americans who were on board a cruise ship under quarantine in Japan because of the coronavirus would be flown back home on a chartered flight, but that they would face another two-week quarantine; about 380 Americans were aboard the Diamond Princess.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actor Claire Bloom is 90. Author Susan Brownmiller is 86. Songwriter Brian Holland is 80. Rock musician Mick Avory (The Kinks) is 77. Jazz musician Henry Threadgill is 77. Actor-model Marisa Berenson is 74. Actor Jane Seymour is 70. Singer Melissa Manchester is 70. Actor Lynn Whitfield is 68. "Simpsons" creator Matt Groening is 67. Model Janice Dickinson is 66. Actor Christopher McDonald is 66. Reggae singer Ali Campbell is 62. Actor Joseph R. Gannascoli is 62. Musician Mikey Craig (Culture Club) is 61. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Darrell Green is 61. Actor-comedian Steven Michael Quezada is 58. Actor Michael Easton is 54. Latin singer Gloria Trevi is 53. Rock musician Stevie Benton (Drowning Pool) is 50. Actor Alex Borstein is 50. Actor Renee O'Connor is 50. Actor Sarah Wynter is 48. Olympic gold medal swimmer Amy Van Dyken-Rouen is 48. Actor-director Miranda July is 47. Rock singer Brandon Boyd (Incubus) is 45. Rock musician Ronnie Vannucci (The Killers) is 45. Rock singer/guitarist Adam Granduciel (The War on Drugs) is 42. Singer-songwriter-musician Conor Oberst (Bright Eyes) is 41. Actor Ashley Lyn Cafagna is 38. Blues-rock musician Gary Clark Jr. is 37. Actor Natalie Morales is 36. Actor Amber Riley is 35. Rapper Megan Thee Stallion is 26. Actor Zach Gordon is 23.

—Associated Press

## LOCAL, STATE &amp; REGION

# Ammon Bundy, veteran of armed standoffs, builds militia network on pandemic backlash

BY RICHARD READ

Los Angeles Times

EMMETT, Idaho — The two dozen demonstrators pressed against the emergency room doors, screaming to be let in.

"Show us the law!" they chanted.

"Let Grandma out!" one shouted.

They had descended on Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Center in Vancouver, Washington, the evening of Jan. 29 to protest the quarantine of Gayle Meyer, a 74-year-old patient who had refused to take a test for the coronavirus.

Police in riot gear guarded entrances as the activists — who authorities said were armed — insisted that Meyer was being held against her will, a claim the hospital denied.

Meyer's 49-year-old daughter, Satin, an anti-mask activist licensed as her caregiver, had summoned the demonstrators, foot soldiers in a rapidly expanding network called People's Rights. With the tap of a thumb on a smartphone, members can call a militia like they'd call an Uber and stage a protest within minutes.

Behind the organization is a familiar name: Ammon Bundy.

He is best known as the leader of the 2016 occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge south of Burns — a deadly 41-day standoff between federal agents and militants who rejected the federal government's authority over public lands across the West.

Now Bundy has seized on the backlash against coronavirus restrictions as an opportunity to start a new movement.

Since March, when he launched People's Rights — which he describes as "neighborhood watch on steroids" — the organization has attracted tens of thousands of members and sponsored more than 50 demonstrations across the country, dispatching gun-toting activists to the homes of politicians, health agency managers and even a police officer who had arrested a protester.

Experts who track extremists say that the network has significant overlap with white supremacist groups and other far-right organizations and that it has whipped up paranoia and rage, risking lives of hospital workers, health officers, politicians and others in the crosshairs.

"We have the potential for multiple Malheurs in multiple states, in that at any moment they could bring hardened far-right activists, often heavily armed, into any one event," said Devin Burghart, executive director of the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights.

In October, the Seattle-based organization and the Montana Human Rights Network published an investigation that found that Bundy had rapidly expanded People's Rights by fusing his core of far-right paramilitary supporters with "a mass base of new activists radicalized in protest" of coronavirus restrictions.

Group leaders envision a form of "neighborhood nationalism," in which the "righteous" stand against the "wicked," the report said.

Investigators found that the network had 20,000 members in 16 states. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times



Richard Read/Los Angeles Times

Ammon Bundy, who led the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016, stands in front of a restaurant Jan. 27 in Emmett, Idaho.

late last month near his home in Idaho, Bundy claimed it had grown to almost 50,000 people in 35 states.

Last fall, Facebook removed an undisclosed number of People's Rights pages from its platform after deeming the network a militarized social movement.

Bundy said his sole cause was defending the freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution — even for LGBTQ people and Black Lives Matter activists whose views he may oppose.

He said he never supported President Donald Trump and didn't vote in the last two presidential elections. In 2016, he was in prison awaiting trial, and this past November he didn't see a point. Contending that the COVID-19 death toll is massively exaggerated, he said that Trump should have worked harder to keep churches and businesses open.

Nonetheless, he encouraged his followers to go to Washington for the now-infamous Jan. 6 rally to distribute leaflets and display People's Rights banners to recruit more members. He said he condemned the siege on the Capitol.

Bundy, 45, is carrying on a family tradition.

The fourth of 14 children in a Mormon family, he grew up on a Nevada ranch. His 74-year-old father, Cliven, became a hero to extreme libertarians in the West when he stopped paying grazing fees in 1993, claiming that his family had ancestral rights to run its cattle on public land and that the government's ownership claims violated the Constitution.

Ammon Bundy left the ranch as a young man, first for Minnesota for two years of Mormon mission service and then to Southern Utah University. Later he moved to Phoenix, where he ran a truck repair business for 14 years.

In 2014, he stood with militias that rallied behind his father's cause when FBI agents arrived at the Nevada ranch with a court order to confiscate the family's cattle. The government backed down to avoid bloodshed, raising the family's stature in far-right circles.

The next year, Bundy, his wife and their six children moved to Emmett, Idaho, a farming town turned bedroom community outside Boise.

But he said that God soon called him to support Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son, Steven — Oregon ranchers sentenced to prison for setting fires on federal lands. In January 2016, Bundy led an armed group that seized the head-

quarters of the Malheur refuge, demanding that the government relinquish ownership and free the Hammonds.

Bundy was arrested during a traffic stop outside the refuge and eventually tried on weapons and conspiracy charges. A militant who fled the stop was shot and killed.

In a startling verdict in October of 2016, Bundy and other defendants were acquitted by jurors who found that federal prosecutors had failed to make their case.

The family's aura of invincibility only grew when a judge declared a mistrial in a criminal conspiracy case against Bundy, his brother Ryan and their father for the 2014 Nevada ranch standoff, saying government lawyers had suppressed evidence.

The cattle outside Bunkerville, Nevada, continue to graze on public land despite more than \$1 million in unpaid fees. Bundy kept a low profile

back in Idaho, where he managed rental properties and restored vintage vehicles with his children. But the pandemic — and resistance to the government telling people what to do — set the stage for his return to activism.

In March, he gathered several dozen supporters in a warehouse he owns in Emmett. In its first public act, the group defied Republican Gov. Brad Little's stay-at-home directive and held an Easter service for about 60 people.

The same month, police arrested Sara Brady, an anti-vaccine activist, for allegedly trespassing during an anti-lockdown protest at a Boise-area playground closed due to coronavirus restrictions.

Bundy publicized the address of the officer who arrested her and led about 40 people to protest outside his home, a tactic that the governor called "disgusting."

But People's Rights continued to expand, establishing hundreds of chapters that Bundy organized with the aim of being able to dispatch 10 protesters to a scene in 10 minutes, 100 in 100 minutes and 1,000 in 1,000 minutes. He instructed each chapter to launch teams to train in secret for paramilitary operations to defend members from criminals or government agents.

In July, he led demonstrators to a public building in Caldwell, Idaho, where they tried to barge into a meeting of officials who were discussing whether to impose a local mask mandate.

"This is not your building," Bundy shouted as he shoved a man guarding the doorway,

video of the protest shows.

The meeting was canceled, though the health board eventually decided to recommend wearing masks in public.

The next month, Bundy and some supporters forced their way past state troopers into an Idaho Statehouse gallery that had been closed because of the pandemic. Police arrested Bundy twice in two days, finally wheeling him out of the building in an office chair. Charged with trespassing and obstructing officers, he was banned from the Capitol for a year.

Last month at the hospital protest in Vancouver, Washington, Kelli Stewart, the People's Rights coordinator for the area, narrated a livestream video on Bundy's YouTube account that ultimately attracted more than 70,000 views.

The video shows a protester trying to pry open locked double doors, and a deputy spraying chemical irritant in his face. The protesters cheered when the hospital released Meyer, whose tearful daughter wheeled her out and helped her into a van.

"Freedom!" a man yelled. Stewart, a longtime Bundy compatriot, berated law enforcement for siding with the hospital instead of the protesters. She said that right-wing activists who joined "back the blue" rallies last summer and waved American flags with blue lines had been duped.

"We're starting to learn that you're actually the standing army our founders warned us against," she said. "They're just dangerous tyrants. We're having a blue-line flag-burning party tonight."

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