



Much at risk in grazing contract protests

The armed protesters occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon's Harney County want ranchers to tear up their federal grazing contracts and turn their cattle out on their allotments without paying their fees.

We understand how ranchers might be tempted to go along with the plan, if for no other reason than to protest the way the federal government manages public lands. But that would be a mistake that could result in harsh financial consequences for the individual producers, and hand opponents of public lands grazing the ammunition they need to shut down contested allotments.

The protesters made their pitch to Harney County ranchers last week. It's based on their misinterpretation of the Constitution that holds that the United States government can't own property within any state not purchased or otherwise deeded to it by that state. Public lands in the West belong to the states and the counties.

Because the federal government can't own the land, it can't charge ranchers grazing fees or otherwise regulate the use of the range. Easy-peasy.

That this arrangement isn't recognized by the federal government, the state of Oregon or the elected officials of Harney County — let alone the surviving members of the Burns Paiute Tribe, whose ancestors were on the land prior to white settlement — is of no concern.

According to our colleagues at Oregon Public Broadcasting, LaVoy Finicum, an Arizona rancher who has served as the protesters' de facto spokesman, told ranchers that he's done it. More importantly, Cliven Bundy, the father of refuge

occupation leader Ammon Bundy, has been doing it for more than 10 years.

The elder Bundy owes the government more than \$1 million in fees and penalties while continuing to graze his cattle on 90,000 acres of federal land in Nevada.

That is probably the most persuasive argument Finicum could make. If Bundy can get away with it for more than a decade, all the while ignoring the Endangered Species Act and other federal regulations, wouldn't you be a chump to pay and follow the rules?

Scott Horngren, an attorney with the Western Resources Legal Center who has represented ranchers in grazing lawsuits, says ranchers shouldn't use Bundy's case as a precedent.

He says breaches of grazing contracts may effectively end a rancher's ability to ever again release livestock onto public lands. Government agencies have a number of legal avenues available to collect past-due accounts.

Any of these consequences could all but end a rancher's business.

Waiting in the wings are the environmentalists who want to end grazing on public land. Ranchers tearing up their grazing contracts and flouting the law would be a boon for their agenda.

Ranchers, farmers and loggers have legitimate disputes with the way federal lands are managed. The key to settling these disputes is constructive engagement with the government and the public at-large.

While protest can also be an effective tool, ranchers must always be mindful how their actions will be judged in the court of public opinion.

Sheriff is professional, kind and honest

To the Editor:

Recently several letters and opinions have been posted in the Blue Mountain Eagle stating Sheriff Palmer should stick to his sheriff duties and not have an opinion on the Malheur refuge group.

I find it interesting that these "writers" can express their own opinions, but our sheriff is not allowed to do the same. In the 37 years I've lived in this county, I've found Sheriff Palmer to be professional yet kind and honest. Yes, he believes in upholding our constitutional rights. We're Americans — shouldn't we all be thinking along those lines?

To date, I've not seen or heard that he has taken a stand for or against the group. If he garners information from persons linked to said group, that would be simply good detective work, not a statement he's joined up!

In closing, I have a suggestion. You've heard the saying "Love it or leave it." Many westsiders are kicking the constitution to the curb. Eugene would certainly love to have you!

Marsha Christensen
John Day

Nothing wrong with sheriff meeting

To the Editor:

I don't see anything wrong with the sheriff meeting with people who voice concerns over constitutional issues that could affect Grant County. I attended that meeting and found it informational.

The people were not the Bundy group. Sheriff Palmer listened to what they said. You apparently have minimal knowledge of the U.S. Constitution or you would recognize that the owning of more than 50 percent of 12 western states is a serious problem. The eastern United States has only 4 percent federal ownership. This whole issue is about the Hammond family being attacked by rogue BLM employees and a rogue U.S. attorney in an attempt to force the sale of their ranch to the federal government! To charge them with terrorism is outrageous! This could be resolved by President Obama releasing the Hammonds from prison. This whole incident reflects poorly on the government. Black Lives Matter and associated groups riot and burn cars and buildings and shoot police officers over what they feel are injustices. Why is a peaceful protest such a big deal in Eastern Oregon?

I suspect part of it is because they are white Christians. If it was Occupy or any of the left wing radical Democrat organizations it would be no big deal!

H. Stangel
Dayville

We are lucky to have sheriff Palmer

To the Editor:

Recently there have been some letters criticizing Sheriff Palmer.

I have lived in Grant County ever since Tom Negus was sheriff. We have had a couple who weren't too good. I have known Glenn Palmer a long time. He has always been a strong supporter of the county in so many ways I have lost count. If he had lunch with some of the Burns occupiers, it was to find out what their plans were that might have affected Grant County.

A lot of us agree with the people who are on that reserve, but not the guns. Don't get me wrong, I think all of us need to be armed.

We have a fine sheriff, and those that try to detract him are wrong. No one is perfect all the time, but we are lucky to have Glenn.

Joe Clarke
Long Creek

Sheriff candidate explains decision

To the Editor:

Today, Jan. 25, after observing the sheer audacity of individuals who think they can dictate the course of Grant County, without the input of all, I have decided to file for the position of sheriff.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I understand the magnitude of the situation and that this decision of mine can help steer the course of Grant County's future, no matter which way the voters choose.

I believe Grant County is part of a republic, and not an oligarchy, which is what it appears it is trying to become. Let us keep it a republic.

When I took my first oath of office as a reserve deputy on April 3, 2000, it was that I would support the Constitution and the laws of the United States and of the state of Oregon, and to honestly and faithfully perform the duties imposed upon the member under the laws of Oregon.

I do not remember that there were any clauses that told me this was optional, and up to my interpretation of the Constitution and laws.

People of Grant County, this is our county, not exclusively some individual group's. You have a voice. Let it be heard, as it has been heard in the past.

Todd McKinley
John Day

Refuge occupation an attack on tax-paying citizens

To the Editor:

The Bundy occupation is an attack on every law-abiding, tax-paying citizen of Oregon. They have no legal or moral right to take the law into their own hands and make demands. Their only power comes from their guns and the threat of violence. The Malheur refuge belongs to all Oregonians, and is beloved by thousands upon thousands of hunters, fisherman, bird watchers and outdoorsmen. The Bundys and their followers will take all that away, giving nothing of value in return. They dishonor all Americans in uniform, whether in the military or in law enforcement. They are anarchists, criminals and bullies.

If you want to see what happens to citizens who act independently of Bundy and his vigilantes, just look to Harney County and Burns. They are shadowed, harassed and intimidated. Ultimately, they will be "tried" in a court of jurors selected by the vigilantes, judged by someone selected by the vigilantes and the inevitable guilt sentence will be carried out by the vigilantes. Does this sound like justice? Bundy and his group are trying to spread their tyranny to Grant County. Please stand up to them as the courageous people of Burns have done. Bundy is a wolf in sheep's clothing who will devour your rights to satisfy his lust for power.

Ted Gaty
Salem

Were sheriff's comments personal or professional?

To the Editor:

In response to Jan Mead's letter to the editor published in the Jan. 20 edition of the Blue Mountain Eagle, the editor posted a clarification saying that our sheriff had responded, "I don't know" when asked whether he approved of the occupiers at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, who are using public buildings and vehicles, destroying fence that is not theirs, endangering or destroying artifacts with their road-building, illegally using computers and preventing public access to public lands.

Sheriff Palmer praised the armed occupiers as "patriots" and indicated he didn't go down to visit them only because Harney County Sheriff David Ward asked him not to. It's hard not to see that as approval of their illegal actions without a clear statement from him to the contrary.

It is always difficult to separate the professional and the personal, and it's even more difficult in a small community. It is not clear to me at this point whether the sheriff was expressing himself as a private citizen or a public official, and whether the meetings took place on work time or when the sheriff was off work. I hope Sheriff Palmer and the Eagle will clarify these important points as soon as possible.

If the support is purely personal,

I hope the occupiers do not mistake it for an invitation from a public figure to come here and disrupt the life and economy of Grant County as they have already done to Harney County. If it was offered as a public figure, many of us will question the ability of our public servants to represent all their constituents fairly and to stick to their job descriptions, which are available from the county.

Janine Goodwin
Prairie City

Government should honor commitment to veterans

To the Editor:

Recently I went to the Veterans Hospital in Portland. The sign entering the approach to the hospital read "The Price of Freedom is Visible Here." It certainly is!

People, men and women, with no limbs, eyes, numerous bodily injuries. It is appalling knowing the fact our veterans have been betrayed by our government officials not keeping promises/contracts. I joined the United States Marines in October 1969 with the promise of free health care for the rest of my life (for veterans honorably discharged).

George W. Bush could not even make his Army Reserve meetings in Texas. Didn't have to. Daddy was a senator. No prosecution of deserting.

Long story short, vets have lost travel pay, payment for medications, etc. Horrible medical care. And by the way, vets have taken cuts in their benefits right and left. When is the last time a senator, congressman or president took a pay cut?

Tim Jewell
Kimberly

Libelous allegations shouldn't be aired in public forum

To the Editor:

The comments in a letter to the editor written by Jan Mead and the large paid advertisement by Judy Schuette (both in the Jan. 20 of the Eagle), demonstrate the most libelous and unwarranted attacks I have ever observed in this newspaper. Both were aimed at Sheriff Palmer and reflect completely unbalanced views about what is legal and what is not.

The list of allegations range from "supporting criminal actions" to having "anti-government feelings." I wonder which government these complainers consider themselves part of.

Sheriff Glenn Palmer is the most law abiding and skilled member of our county's law enforcement community. He and his family are among the most giving and honorable people in Grant County. Sheriff Palmer does not sit at a desk all day. He is directly involved in the daily rescue operations and criminal investigations as well as appropriate contacts with many ongoing events. Why would anyone attack this valued man who has the highest ethical standards and puts his life on the line for our residents every day?

The hidden agenda of the complainers has most to do with the fact that this Sheriff supports our U.S. Constitution while others do not. This Sheriff made an oath that is not to partisan politicians, not to the Forest Service and not to the federal government.

Our country has been divided by the current federal administration, which has an incredible amount of litigation ongoing in response to their violations of our Constitution. Communist and Islamic factions strongly support throwing out our law while discrediting our law enforcement across the nation. Never before has a president endorsed such lawless actions and inactions in their selective application of laws.

This is a time to support our law abiding sheriff. He and the other members of law enforcement put their lives on the line for our residents. Those who have joined the other "faction" need to send their allegations to an appropriate investigative body — not to air libelous false allegations in a public forum.

Tom McHatten
Long Creek

WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY

- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
- **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: tocc1862@centurylink.net.
- **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
- **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
- **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
- **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: monument@oregontrail.net.
- **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-

932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.

- **Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: pchall@ortelco.net.
- **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: cityseneca@centurytel.net.

SALEM

- **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: www.governor.state.or.us/governor.html.
- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Email: rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm.

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PUBLISHER..... MARISSA WILLIAMS, MARISSA@BMEAGLE.COM
 EDITOR..... SEAN HART, EDITOR@BMEAGLE.COM
 ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT..... KRISTINA KREGER, KRISTINA@BMEAGLE.COM
 EDITORIAL ASSISTANT..... CHERYL HOEFLE, CHERYL@BMEAGLE.COM
 COMMUNITY NEWS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
 SPORTS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
 MARKETING REP..... KIM KELL, ADS@BMEAGLE.COM
 OFFICE MANAGER..... LINDSAY BULLOCK, OFFICE@BMEAGLE.COM

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