

Occupation may end, but issues remain

Federal and state officials effectively altered the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Tuesday, arresting eight protesters and killing a ninth.

The protesters had demanded that two Harney County ranchers serving five-year sentences for burning federal land be released, and that federal public lands be turned over to the state, the county and to private ownership. It was a futile endeavor from the start that lacked any legal basis.

For better or worse, the occupation did draw some national attention to legitimate issues concerning the U.S. government's management of its vast holding of public lands. Now what?

It will be all too easy for many casual observers east of the Rockies, and even a good many in the liberal urban centers of the West, to dismiss all of this as the machinations of a half-cocked collection of religious zealots, disenfranchised Reubens and anti-government nuts with too many guns and a crazy interpretation of the Constitution.

Unfortunately, that would miss the real underlying issues.

The standoff is diminished, but the anger and frustration of many farmers, ranchers and lumbermen in Harney County and throughout the West remains unchanged. Their interests must now be pressed in the court of public opinion, and non-Westerners made to understand the real issues.

The federal government holds more than half the land in the West. The economic and civic fabric of rural communities depends on trees cut from the forest, livestock grazed on the range and

minerals gleaned from the mining claims.

The government once encouraged these activities in the service of the country's growing population and in fulfillment of its manifest destiny. Now, policies have changed and that same government seems to be draining the lifeblood of the rural West.

Many in the rural West don't think their government listens to them and that their concerns are given short shrift. They believe that their livelihoods, their very way of life, are in the hands of bureaucrats controlled by interests outside their communities.

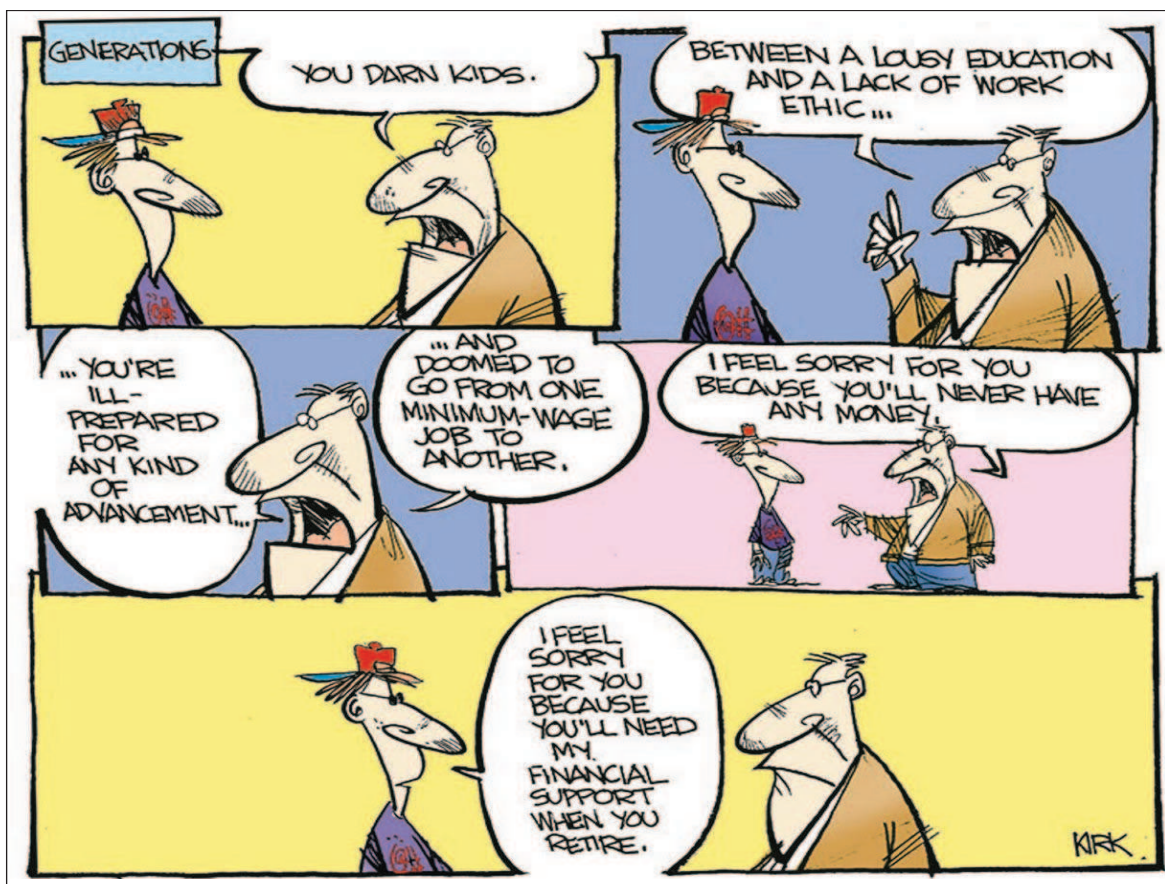
They don't understand how the government can claim to be a good steward while it lets its forests fill with fuel that feeds ever more terrible wildfires that destroy the very habitat it seeks to protect. They bristle at what they perceive to be the mismanagement of these fires that causes their own property to be damaged or destroyed.

They are stymied at every turn by the inertia that attends every decision, every necessary action on a grazing allotment or timber harvest. They are tired of the endless environmental litigation that seems bent on driving even the most conservation-minded producers off public lands.

They watch as their government adds to its empire, using taxpayer money to outbid local buyers and take more land off the tax roles, and erode private economic opportunities.

They want to be good stewards, to do the right thing. But they want a fair shake.

Now is the time to tell these stories, to tell America that rural Western lives matter.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Buck up and be counted!'

To the Editor:

On Saturday, Jan. 23, three of us traveled to the refuge where the land rights group had set up to protest the double jeopardy jailing of the Hammonds and also discuss the taking of our land by the obtrusive federal government. We wanted to query the participants as to the purpose and intent of the group and, if favorable, lend our support (even though none of us were ranchers).

To say we were impressed is an understatement. We were warmly received, and any and all of our questions were politely and completely answered. We then felt we should add our voice and support.

This was not an armed, ragtag rebellion, but a peaceful demonstration against an ever increasing, overbearing government bound and determined to usurp our inalienable and God-given rights.

We had a great presentation of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, given by Ammon and Ryan Bundy from Nevada (the organizers). Their points were well presented and accurate.

It is important to note that the Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17, limits the land that the federal government can own, and that does not include our public lands (BLM, USFS, etc.). Until we take these lands back to be managed by the state and the counties, we must rein in the federal land managers and remind them that we the people own the land, and they are just the managers (poor ones at that).

It is time we stood up for our rights and stop being "sheeple"!

Our final thought, as George Washington so aptly stated, "Government is not reason: it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

Buck up and be counted!

Herb Brusman

John Day

Jerry Larkin

Canyon City

Joseph Irwin

Prairie City

sheriff's office "takes pride in the delivery of security to its citizenry to maintain a peaceful community," and strives for "professionalism" with the goal of delivering the "highest quality service possible in Grant County." The actions and affiliations of Sheriff Palmer over the past few years, however, call these statements into question. His most recent statements and actions with regard to the armed occupation of the Malheur Refuge by domestic terrorists, however, fly in the face of those goals.

If Sheriff Palmer does not believe that he can enforce the ordinances and laws of Grant County, the state of Oregon and the United States — which he clearly does not, given his support of the heavily armed thugs occupying Malheur (going so far as to invite them to Grant County) — then he should resign immediately. Frankly, I'm surprised he hasn't, in good conscience, felt compelled to do so already, being, as he asserts, such a strict constitutionalist.

The sooner the better, please.

Susan Hayes

Glorieta, New Mexico

Editor's note: Tad Houpt, Canyon City, said he invited the occupiers to a lunch meeting attended by Palmer, who said he was unaware they would be there. Houpt also said he invited refuge occupiers to a planned meeting Jan. 26, which Palmer attended until shortly before it was scheduled to begin when news broke the occupiers had been arrested en route. Palmer has not responded to multiple requests for comment.

Crazy times in Eastern Oregon

To the Editor:

Regarding all the craziness of Tuesday afternoon and evening (Jan. 26): After looking at different images on the Internet, I was disturbed to see Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer armed to the teeth and helping run a roadblock near Seneca. What struck me is that I believe that Palmer had more loyalty to the Bundy gang than he had to other law officers at the scene.

I have to wonder how uncomfortable that made those Oregon State Police officers who were present. I am certain that I would not have wanted that radical individual behind me with a shotgun.

Moving to the community meeting at the John Day Senior Center, I want to commend Grant County Commissioner Chris Labhart for having the courage to pack a protest sign. And I really respect Gordon Larson for standing up in the meeting to tell some of the Bundy gang that we'll take care of our own problems in Grant County; we are not intimidated by them, and we do not want them here.

Terry Steele

Ritter

What happened to constitutional rights?

To the Editor:

Is it illegal to drive down a public road to a public meeting? What happened to our constitutional rights as Americans? The grassroots movement people are not the terrorists.

Mary Carr

Seneca

Sheriff should resign if he cannot enforce laws

To the Editor:

According to the Grant County sheriff's official website, the

Constitution is a living document

To the Editor:

I appreciate that our Constitution is a living document, that it is broad enough to embrace a diverse population and a vast territory. It is a group of ideas and concepts that are flexible enough and large enough to grow and adapt as technology, people and social structures evolve. I respect our Constitution as something far greater than a pamphlet to keep in a shirt pocket.

I also appreciate that there are people who dedicate their lives to understanding, applying and growing the Constitution; making peaceful, educated decisions based on our present time, and a history of lessons learned. It is from these experts that I would prefer to interpret the rule of our land — over someone with a gun and an agenda.

In addition, I appreciate that our country has embraced our responsibility to further generations. That we have chosen the long view over short-term economic greed. We employ people who dedicate their lives to ensuring that our natural world can live on in a healthy way, while still providing us with our necessities. These are educated and experienced individuals, who know the balance necessary for continued environmental health and resource extraction. Because of this, I can go anywhere in our country and still find wild places that are cared for and preserved.

Not only that, but our local forest service has received national attention for the exemplary work they have done — for their ability to listen to residents and to adopt local concerns into forest and range planning.

To replace teams of botanists, biologists, hydrologists, geologists, engineers and others with the anecdotal information of a few vested individuals is foolhardy.

I appreciate that over the past two and a half centuries, our democracy has stood, rewarding peaceful progression over hostile force, with a system by which all voices can be heard. I sincerely hope we can stand as an example of what an effective democracy provides, as an example of the power of listening, discussion and understanding over the use of force, tyranny, terrorism and threats. We have come too far.

Mytchell Mead

John Day

'When is our next election?'

To the Editor:

What does Sheriff Palmer's description of a "patriot" sound like? When is our next election?

Mark Murray

Prairie City

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