

# CELEBRATING THE FOURTH OF JULY

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# President Trump pardons Hammonds

## Burns ranchers granted clemency after terrorism conviction for range fire

By Sean Hart  
Blue Mountain Eagle

President Donald Trump fully pardoned Burns ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond Tuesday.

Dwight Hammond and his son Steven were resentenced on appeal to the five-year minimums mandated by the federal terrorism law under which they were convicted after they lit a fire on their grazing land that burned

onto federal land in 2012. The original judge issued lesser sentences, which had been served before the Hammonds were re-imprisoned in 2016.

"The evidence at trial regarding the Hammonds' responsibility for the fire was conflicting, and the jury acquitted them on most of the charges," a statement from the White House press secretary said. "At the Hammonds' original sentencing, the judge noted that they are respected in the community

and that imposing the mandatory minimum, 5-year prison sentence would 'shock the conscience' and be 'grossly disproportionate to the severity' of their conduct."

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden told the Eagle Friday he had recently spoken with the president, who was "sympathetic" to the Hammonds' case. Walden described the pardons as "a win for justice" after Dwight and Steven Hammond had served three and

four years, respectively.

"For far too long, Dwight and Steven Hammond have been serving a mandatory minimum sentence that was established for terrorists," Walden said in a statement. "... As ranchers across eastern Oregon frequently tell me, the Hammonds didn't deserve a five year sentence for using fire as a management tool, something the federal government does all the time."

Walden said he has introduced



Dwight Hammond



Steven Hammond

a bill in Congress to ensure farmers and ranchers are not prosecuted as terrorists for using fire for

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## John Day man charged with rape against multiple victims

Blue Mountain Eagle

A homeless John Day man has been charged with sex crimes against multiple victims.

George Earl McLean, 42, was charged July 6 with two counts of first-degree rape, first-degree sexual penetration, three counts of first-degree sexual abuse, one count of strangulation and two counts of harassment, according to court documents filed by Grant County Deputy District Attorney Mara Houck.

Six of the charges relate to one victim and allegedly occurred in February, according to court documents, and three of the charges relate to another victim and allegedly occurred in July 2016.

Grant County Undersheriff Zach Mobley said the sheriff's office and the John Day Police Department investigated the case jointly July 5. He encouraged any other victims, or anyone with more information, to contact the sheriff's office or police department.

McLean was convicted of harassment in 2002 and 2008, fourth-degree assault in 2011, menacing in 2013 and strangulation and menacing in 2014, according to court documents.



George Earl McLean



The Eagle/Sean Hart  
Malheur Lumber Co. Managing Director John Shelk, left, gives a tour of the John Day mill to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, Friday.

# Merkley meets with locals

## New Farm Bill could be boon for rural areas

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A trade war with China, immigration at the Mexican border and President Donald Trump's pick for a vacant U.S. Supreme Court seat were on many people's minds when Sen. Jeff Merkley traveled to John Day on July 6, but his big announcements had more to do with rural development and the timber industry.

Merkley toured the Malheur Lumber Co. mill and led a well-attended town hall meeting in the John Day Senior Center. He has attended a town hall meeting in each of Oregon's 36 counties every year since 2009, he said.

The ranking member of the Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Merkley also sits on the Senate's Budget, Foreign Relations, and Environment and Public Works committees.

## Infrastructure

Improving the nation's infrastructure is high on Merkley's to-do list. Infrastructure funding could be key to completing several critical projects in John Day.

"John Day is doing exciting new stuff," Merkley told the Eagle, such as using reclaimed water to create a tourist attraction. "This is not just pie in the sky. This is real action."

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# Commissioner Boyd Britton steps down after 15 years

## Brittons close welding shop, ready to move

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Boyd Britton stepped down from his position as a Grant County commissioner after more than 15 years, completing nearly four terms.

Britton, easily recognized for his handlebar mustache, resigned June 29, attending his last county court meeting on June 27.

Attorney Rob Raschio, who has a firm in Canyon City, was appointed interim commissioner on July 3 to fill out the remainder of Britton's term. Sam Palmer and Gordon Larson will be on the November ballot for the position.

Britton and his wife, Bonnie, have lived in John Day for 22 years and owned Boyd Britton Welding, which they opened six months after arriving. They plan to move to Show Low,

Arizona, near family.

Britton served as a commissioner with three judges, Dennis Reynolds, Mark Webb and Scott Myers.

County Judge Scott Myers said there were ups and downs at times on different issues serving with Britton.

"It was interesting to work with him," Myers said. "We agreed on several things and disagreed on several things, but we always respected each other's right to an opinion."

Britton said his approach to serving as a commissioner was "Let's get it done," noting the court has to work together to accomplish goals.

He said he advocated for Community Counseling Solutions to take over the management of the county health department.

"I think it's a model for the rest of the state to have mental health and public health in the same building,"



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Boyd Britton does the announcing at the 2017 '62 Days Parade in Canyon City.

he said. "CCS has done a fantastic job. It's something I feel strongly about."

Britton said he recalls walking with a group, led by park manager Dennis Bradley, around the perim-

eter of Bates State Park. He said he was proud to help establish it.

He said the best thing he's done for Grant County was inviting Susan Jane Brown, an environmental attorney who litigated many timber sales, to tour the area. The discussion eventually led to the creation of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners collaborative, in which Brown still participates. He said because of the formation of the collaborative, there has been a significant increase in timber volume harvested with few lawsuits.

"The collaborative group and the stewardship contract will leave the longest lasting impact on the county," he said. "The pendulum has started swinging the other way. With the choking of the forest with all this fuel, the environmentalists see that with the halting of timber activities, our forests are becoming unhealthy."

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