

Freedom:

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with groups like the Proud Boys, an extremist group that has been labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and whose members describe themselves as “Western chauvinists.”

Gibson currently faces felony charges for inciting a riot for his role in a Portland street fight in May 2019 between Patriot Prayer members and members of the anti-fascist community that resulted in a woman being knocked unconscious and sent to the hospital with an alleged vertebrae fracture.

Joshua Linn is a teacher at Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston and attended the beginning of the May 30 rally after he said a co-worker texted him about its connections to white supremacist groups.

After standing and watching a few speakers from the back, Linn said he found most of them interesting and didn’t see any associations with white supremacy.

“It doesn’t seem like a white supremacist rally to me,” he said.

Gibson was joined by local speakers like HollyJo Beers, the local lead for the Three Percenters who is also running for Umatilla County commissioner. Beers didn’t use the rally as an explicit campaigning event but focused her time on the stage to discuss the Constitution and how she believes current restrictions are threatening the freedoms secured within it.

“We were pleased with the turnout and the people were dynamic speakers,” Beers said after the rally. “None of it was racist, none of it was non-inclusive.”

About three blocks away from the “Hermiston Freedom Rally,” a protest labeled “Essential not Sacrificial” started at the same time.

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 farmworkers 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 “Hermis-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Patriot Prayer founder Joey Gibson speaks during the “Hermiston Freedom Rally” on Saturday, May 30, 2020. Gibson was one of about a dozen speakers during the event, which lasted about three hours.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Rallygoers filled Festival Street in downtown Hermiston during the “Hermiston Freedom Rally” on Saturday, May 30, 2020. The rally drew in excess of 100 people and sparked a counter protest elsewhere in town.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
An open carry activist patrols the edges of the “Hermiston Freedom Rally” on Saturday, May 30, 2020. The event took place on the festival street in downtown Hermiston.

ton Freedom Rally,” though others opted not to stay away.

During a few of the speakers on May 30, 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 the 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 at the event.

Some speakers delved into topics like abortion and vaccinations, while others directly accused Democratic leaders of deliberately implementing the “lockdown” to harm the 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, 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.”

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

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

News editor Jade McDowell contributed to this report.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Protestors gather on the sidewalk at Roy Raley Park to protest against racism and police violence. The protest quickly drew around 150 participants waving signs and chanting.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Protestors kneel on the sidewalk at Roy Raley Park and chant “Say his name – George Floyd” in a call and response. The protest quickly drew around 150 participants waving signs and chanting.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Protestors march toward downtown Pendleton from Roy Raley Park on Monday, June 1, 2020. The protest, which centered against racism and police violence, drew approximately 150 protestors.

George Floyd:

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least one man shouted the N-word at a group of teenagers standing on one of the corners.

The protest remained peaceful as it stretched past its previously planned hour-long time slot, however, and at one point two officers from the Hermiston Police Department arrived and handed out water bottles to protesters.

Isis Ilias brought her 8-year-old daughter, Abi Gutierrez, to the protest, and said her daughter kept asking her questions.

“It’s a good way for her to learn ... She is going to learn something,” she said. “I don’t know what she’ll learn, but it will be something that she will not learn at home.”

Ilias said she was headed to Pendleton’s protest next.

There, a crowd of a roughly 150 people held signs similar signs to the Hermiston group. Their chants rotated between “Police reform now,” “Black Lives Matter,” and

“Say his name: George Floyd.”

But for the roughly 150 people who gathered at Roy Raley Park to protest the death of Floyd and other instances of black people dying at the hands of police, there was a consistent thrum throughout the crowd: “No justice, no peace.”

For black protesters, the event was personal, a chance to act on the pain and fear that comes from each fatal encounter between law enforcement and black people.

Kadedra Hackler brought a homemade Black Lives Matter poster with other notes on the margins, like, “It could’ve been my dad, uncles, cousins, friends, mom, sister, niece, coworker (or) ME.”


Hackler noted that there weren’t many African Americans in Pendleton — the U.S. Census estimates 2.2% as of 2018 — so she was heartened that so many people showed up.

The U.S. Census estimates Hermiston residents who fall under the category of black or African American alone at 0.4% as of 2019.

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