

## **Local residents say occupier's death was tragic**

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Nobody wanted it to end in bloodshed.

Local officials and environmental advocates agreed that, regardless of anyone's thoughts on the people who occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge — seven of whom were arrested Tuesday night en route to John Day — the death of Robert "LaVoy" Finicum was tragic.

"I woke up this morning repulsed by the whole thing. Nobody should have died," state Rep. Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass, said on Wednesday.

He also admonished Gov. Kate Brown for reaching out to federal officials for help rather than attempting to mediate the situation herself.

"It was just a missed opportunity," Wilson said. "She didn't get involved."

The arrests came 25 days after Ammon Bundy, son of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, took over the 293-square mile wildlife refuge. The seizure followed a peaceful protest in neighboring Burns, nearly 30 miles away.

The ensuing occupation brought national media attention to Harney County. U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, told the Daily Courier earlier this month that, although he didn't agree with Bundy's methods, the situation made his colleagues in Congress more sympathetic to rural Oregon's woes.

"At first it was a joke, but it got serious really quickly," he said. "It went from 'What is happening in your district?' to 'How can I help?'"

On Wednesday, Walden issued a statement, echoing Wilson's frustration.

"I've been in close contact with local and federal officials throughout this long standoff, and we had all hoped for a peaceful conclusion to the situation in Harney County," he wrote. "Sadly, our hopes were shattered with the shooting that occurred during last night's arrest."

The Josephine County Board of Commissioners business meeting was attended by local residents who spoke out against the arrests. The wording differed only slightly with each testimony, but the message was the same: Rural communities feel their issues are falling on deaf ears as the men agitating for local control get tossed in jail.

Some local residents, however, haven't been too thrilled with the occupation.

Dave Strahan, a land preservation advocate and former member of the Three Rivers School Board, expressed regret for the death of Finicum, the self-appointed spokesman for Ammon Bundy and the occupation effort in Malheur County. But he also didn't mince words when it came to his impression of the armed occupation as a whole.

"I think these people are zealots," Strahan said. "They're over-reactionary. They're somewhat for themselves, thinking they're going to pull some kind of revolution here."

In fact, much of the criticism lobbed at Bundy and the majority of the men and women hunkered down at the bird sanctuary was focused on their states of origin.

Not one of the seven arrested on Tuesday night is from Oregon.

"I think it's somewhat ironic that they're not local," Strahan said.