



Statement of

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**Before the United States House of Representatives Committees on Natural
Resources and Homeland Security**

Minority Forum: Countering Extremism on America's Public Lands

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Ranking Member Grijalva and Ranking Member Thompson, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about militant extremism on our public lands.

I am David Jenkins, president of Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship (CRS), a national grassroots organization of conservatives who are dedicated to the original conservative philosophy that compels us to be good stewards of our natural heritage.

Let me begin by expressing disappointment that we are not discussing this problem at a full committee hearing. In light of the Malheur Refuge takeover earlier this year, increasing threats against land managers, and militant groups like Oath Keepers trying to thwart agency action, this is clearly an issue that deserves bipartisan attention.

At CRS we increased our focus on public land extremism after the 2014 Bunkerville Standoff in Nevada, where Cliven Bundy and the armed militants he rallied to his aid prevented the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and federal law enforcement officers from carrying out a court order.

The initial decision by law enforcement to stand down during that incident to avoid bloodshed was understandable given the circumstances. But we became concerned when more than a year passed without Mr. Bundy or any his supporters—some of

whom aimed rifles at law enforcement officers—being held accountable for their crimes.

Cut through the Bundys' rebellious ideology, which is no doubt a concoction of convenience to justify ignoring the law, and what you have is a bunch of bullies. The use of armed force and the threat of violence to get one's way in a democracy is the worst kind of bullying. It undermines the rule of law and tramples on the rights of every other American.

We believe that the Obama Administration was way too timid following Bunkerville. When dealing with any bully—be it a terrorist, a tinhorn dictator, a drug dealer, or a belligerent rancher—appeasement never works.

By abandoning its effort to remove Bundy's cattle, choosing not to actively manage public lands near Bundy's Ranch, and failing to arrest Bundy and others who threatened government personnel at Bunkerville, the Administration emboldened the Bundy clan to escalate its lawlessness and use of intimidation.

A reasonable assumption, given the overlap of individuals involved, is that the Malheur Refuge takeover would never have occurred if those responsible for Bunkerville had been held accountable at some point during those intervening 18 months.

Now that arrests have been made for both incidents, we hope this signals a more resolute approach to militant extremism on our public lands, with firm and timely enforcement of the law. It is important that land managers have the law enforcement resources required to do that, which should include more personnel and strong support from the Department of Justice.

As Theodore Roosevelt wisely put it, the law "*must be enforced with resolute firmness, because weakness in enforcing it means in the end that there is no justice and no law, nothing but the rule of disorderly and unscrupulous strength.*"

We have also been very concerned about those—be they on the political right or left—who attach the "conservative" or "patriot" label to the Bundys or other sovereign citizen radicals. There is nothing remotely conservative or patriotic about them or their ludicrous interpretation of the Constitution.

In no way can rejecting the authority of the United States government, or ignoring laws enacted by democratically elected representatives of the very institutions set forth in the Constitution, be considered patriotic.

Likewise, genuine conservatism is the polar opposite of radicalism. It respects tradition, recognizes the importance of order, values personal responsibility, and upholds the rule of law. Conservatism is also about freedom, but a real conservative understands that freedom and responsibility go hand-in-hand—that one cannot exist without the other.

Most Americans I think consider themselves patriotic, and many, like me, also consider themselves conservative. No good can come from attaching labels to radicals that may elicit sympathy or serve to legitimize their dangerous views in the minds of others.

This is also why it is so important that extremism and violence on our public lands be unequivocally rejected by Republicans and Democrats alike, and that addressing this growing problem be a bi-partisan endeavor.

Unfortunately, there is a handful of Republican lawmakers, at both the state and federal level, who have chosen to sympathize or side with extremists like the Bundys.

This includes people like Nevada State Assemblywoman Michele Fiore and other members of the so called “Coalition of Western States” who, during the Malheur Refuge takeover, actually went to Oregon to assist the occupiers.

Even more troubling, it seems the Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Rob Bishop (UT-1) falls into this category as well.

One of the reasons we are here today is his unwillingness to hold hearings on public land extremism. When asked back in January, during the Malheur Refuge takeover, if he would hold hearings about that incident, Bishop said that he instead wants to continue oversight of, and I quote: “*what we feel is the abuse of individuals by the federal land management agencies...*”

As Ranking Member Grijalva well knows, Chairman Bishop also declined his request to jointly offer a bipartisan resolution condemning the occupation. Nor did Bishop verbally condemn the occupation. When asked to comment by the media, he sympathized with the militants, saying that he understands their “frustration.”

This kind of rhetoric is nothing new for Bishop. He regularly responds to natural resource protection efforts with over-the-top rhetoric that seems tailor made to inflame the passions of radicals.

Last summer when the President announced new national monuments in Texas, Nevada and California, Bishop blasted the designations — none of which were in Utah — saying “*I condemn this shameful power move, which makes states and citizens fearful that the federal government can invade at any time to seize more lands like bandits in the night.*”

The Chairman knows full well that those designations did nothing to alter land ownership. So why would he choose words like “invade,” “seize” and “bandits” unless he was trying to provoke outrage.

At an event in Salt Lake City last year Bishop called the Antiquities Act, which was passed by a Republican Congress and signed into law by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt “*the most evil act ever invented*” and said that anyone there who liked the law should “*die*” in order to get “*stupidity out of the gene pool.*”

Bishop, along with fellow members of the Utah delegation Senator Orin Hatch and Congressman Jason Chaffetz, have recently hinted that establishment of a Bears Ears national monument in their state would spark violence, with Hatch seeming to excuse such an outcome as the product of “*...deeply held positions that cannot just be ignored.*”

Such rhetoric is irresponsible under any circumstance, but given the current environment, it is inexcusable.

Also, in the wake of Bunkerville and Malheur, and in the face of armed extremists and growing threats against land management personnel, Congressman Chaffetz has inexplicably introduced [H.R. 4751](#), legislation that would strip the Forest Service and BLM of their law enforcement authority and transfer jurisdiction to local sheriffs.

The problems with this legislation are too numerous to cover here, but perhaps the biggest is that dozens of sheriffs, possibly as many as 200, belong to the Constitutional Sheriffs and Police Officers Association, an organization that subscribes to many of the same beliefs that help drive extremism and lawlessness on our public lands.

This bill would essentially be handing control of our federal lands—and the safety of land managers—over to the very extremists we need to protect them from.

Regardless of where one stands on public land policy, actions and rhetoric that encourage or support militant extremism on our public lands needs to stop.

Our nation is blessed with a rich endowment of parks, forests, refuges and conservation lands. At CRS we support keeping these lands public and having them managed responsibly—not just for us here today, but for our children and grandchildren. That cannot happen if greedy, radical, unprincipled bullies can declare themselves above the law and seize these lands for their own exclusive use.

Despite all of their rhetoric about the Constitution, freedom and God, in truth, these extremists—along with those who support them—are attacking our nation, its laws, its values, its history, and the democratic processes established by our forefathers. They are the opposite of conservative, and they will continue to bully, threaten, and test the limits of civil society until they are stopped.

We need strong bi-partisan leadership to present a united front against this threat, to protect our national public lands, to keep visitors safe, to enforce the law with, as TR said, “resolute firmness, and to provide our federal agencies with the resources and support they need to do their job.

Thank you.