

Donald Trump Vet Coalition Leader Said This About the Oregon Militia Protest

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said the armed standoff at a national wildlife refuge in Oregon had gone on “too long,” and that once people are allowed to take over federal property, “you don’t have a government anymore.”

But last week, after he made those comments, the head of a veterans’ group formed by his campaign traveled to Oregon to meet with protesters whom he described as a “peaceful” and “constitutionally just” movement.

Although Jerry DeLemus, a 61-year-old retired Marine, said he made the visit on his own rather than as a representative of Trump’s campaign, he is the only member of a presidential campaign to have openly visited the occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge since it began on Jan. 2.

His presence at the Oregon standoff highlights the array of extreme views in Trump’s support base, as the billionaire real-estate mogul taps a vein of grassroots supporters who are deeply upset with current federal leadership in his quest to lead the Republican Party in this year’s presidential election.

In an interview on Tuesday, DeLemus told Reuters that while he was skeptical of the occupation at first, he now thinks the group is enjoying “great success” in resisting the “thug-like, terroristic” actions of the federal government by claiming the land for local citizens.

Trump’s campaign has received support from several other sources who hold more extreme views than him, including white supremacist groups that recently launched a pro-Trump

automated telephone campaign in Iowa and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, whose endorsement Trump rejected in August.

Unlike those supporters, however, DeLemus is a formal member of Trump's campaign and says he plans to help inform the candidate about the true nature of the standoff in Oregon in an effort to convince Trump to support their cause.

The armed protesters garrisoned at the wildlife refuge are led by Ammon Bundy, a rancher from Nevada. The occupation, which began as a protest against the extended prison sentences of local ranchers who set fire to federal land, is now focused on reclaiming the federal land in the county for local citizens.

"It's my intention to ensure that he has the whole story," DeLemus said of Trump. "I think it'll really arouse him, and once he understands, I wouldn't be surprised to see him heading out West."

The Trump campaign did not respond to requests for comment.

Dan Shea, a professor of government at Maine's Colby College who has studied the polarization of American voters, says the Oregon standoff would likely have strong appeal to some Trump supporters.

"What Trump supporters want is dramatic action, and for some, what's happening in Oregon is an example of that."

DeLemus has a history of expressing views and taking actions that are more extreme than those of Trump, who has been criticized by Democrats and Republicans alike for what some see as a stream of shocking, offensive and radical remarks.

In 2014, DeLemus spent about a month in Nevada leading a makeshift militia in a standoff with the Bureau of Land Management on behalf of rancher Cliven Bundy, whose sons are leading the Oregon occupation.

Last year, DeLemus also made headlines for planning an art

contest for people to draw the Prophet Mohammad in New Hampshire, though he called it off for public safety reasons. Depictions of the prophet of Islam are considered offensive by many Muslims.

(Editing by Jason Szep and Matthew Lewis)

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