

# THE DAILY SENTINEL

GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

## Why do fringe ideas flourish here?

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Remember the uproar when Colorado Mesa University was associated with bringing John Casey to speak at the Energy Forum? Tim Foster did everything possible to distance CMU from the speaker and the surrounding controversy. He even phoned me after I wrote about it. The scientific community knew John Casey had never published any peer-reviewed studies. They knew he was promoting fringe ideas.

Since the ancient Greeks, civilized nations have valued academia because of its willingness to expose students to new and controversial ideas, while teaching them to think. Usually the ideas promoted by universities are cutting edge. CMU does this well with its Water Center.

Unfortunately between limited academic freedom for professors and a local population that puts little value on open minds, CMU keeps getting dragged into association with backward thinking events. Recently the school had to deal with a flap involving a proposed Bible giveaway to graduating nursing students.

The latest is a Denver attorney with some pretty odd beliefs about public lands making a presentation there on March 15. To be fair, this is not a university-sponsored event. The Public Land Access Association, founded by Brandon Siegfried, is simply renting the South Ballroom. Participants will hear a litigator who has written pieces for the Cato Institute, deliver a talk titled "Public Access Claims in Colorado, a Primer for Officials." The \$50 fee for this event will pay to hire this attorney to represent the association "to recover many protected land routes."

The people bringing James Beckwith to Grand Junction are strong supporters of the same ideas promoted by the Bundy loons in Oregon. According to the Center for Western Priorities, more than half of the people at the refuge espouse fringe ideas about public lands. These fringe ideas are coming out of the American Lands Council, an organization dedicated to delivering the management of public lands to states.

In 2013, people with these fringe ideas destroyed a barrier that blocked Cushman Creek Road in Montrose County. In 2014, supporters illegally reopened a road in Utah that had been closed to protect Pueblo Indian artifacts. Subsequent to these protests, local supporters staged a rally at the Grand Junction BLM office. In attendance were County Commissioners Scott McInnis, Rose Pugliese and John Justman. Pugliese mentioned that she had been educated about public lands by

Siegfried. She also eventually caused Mesa County to become a member of the American Lands Council.

At the BLM protest meeting, state Sen. Ray Scott said, “Our opposition tried to spin this into something it’s not, which is the selling off of public lands... They come up with these wild schemes that they started talking about, that all we wanted to do is get control of public lands for the state, and then we would go sell them. Are you kidding? These people want to protect public lands more than what the federal government wants to do. They’ve got it backwards.”

Somebody should tell Scott two things: the Bundy loons want the federal government to cede all public land to ranchers; and the state of Colorado does not have the money to manage these lands. The American Lands Council, the Public Land Access Association and the Bundy loons are not interested in protecting all users of public lands. They will protect ATV enthusiasts, ranchers, and extractive industries.

One of the most forgotten groups in this whole mess are Native Americans. The Burns Paiute Tribe, which never ceded any of its rights to its ancestral territory, including the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, are very concerned about the handling of cultural artifacts and that some might go missing.

Patrick Borunda, a Vietnam combat veteran, economic and community development professional and Native American living in the Pacific Northwest had this to say: “This is insane. If these were not white people they’d have been taken down days ago. These are cultural vandals shuffling through ancient Native Artifacts as though they were baseball cards! What ... is wrong with the FBI and the rest of the federal law enforcement establishment? If this was Pine Ridge these people would be on slabs in a morgue somewhere. Remind me of why we’re paying you to enforce the law, please? “

Good question. Why was nothing done after the standoff at the Bundy Ranch? Why isn’t somebody in jail? Why are ranchers still grazing cattle on public lands without paying grazing fees to the American people? Why are a bunch of armed loons bulldozing roads across land holding the history of Native Americans going back 6,000 or more years? Why are our local officials following fringe legal theories? Why do we keep electing people with such fringe beliefs? When will our university start acting like a real university, and sponsor events to help our community escape fringe scientific and legal thinking?