



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on July 11, 2018

Trump Pardons Father and Son Ranchers Unjustly Imprisoned as “Terrorists”

President Donald Trump on Tuesday pardoned Oregon ranchers Dwight (shown) and Steven Hammond, who have been serving five-year prison sentences after having been prosecuted by the Obama administration as “terrorists” under the federal Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. Their crime? They were prosecuted for conducting controlled burns on their own ranch in 2001 and 2006 that got out of control and spread to less than 150 acres of federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land.



As we reported in covering their trial, the fires caused no real damage and no threat to lives, homes, or property of other citizens. In fact, the BLM acknowledged that the 2001 fire for which the Hammonds were prosecuted had actually “improved range conditions” on the public lands. By way of contrast, as we have reported previously (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), the BLM, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service “are a veritable Arsons-R-Us, annually burning up millions of acres of public lands and tens of thousands of acres of private property, as well as endangering lives (and sometimes taking them) and destroying homes.” Not one of the federal employees or officials responsible for these massive infernos is ever prosecuted, of course.

Federal District Court Judge Michael Hogan recognized that the Hammonds were being railroaded and subjected to malicious prosecution. In their first trial, in 2012, Judge Hogan ruled that imposing a five-year mandatory minimum prison sentence on the Hammonds would “shock the conscience” of the court. It “would result in a sentence which is grossly disproportionate to the severity of the offenses here,” he said. “It just would not be — would not meet any idea I have of justice, proportionality.” The Hammonds’ actions, he reasoned, “could not have been conduct intended” under the anti-terrorism law. Thus, Judge Hogan used his discretionary authority to sentence Dwight Hammond (then 74) to three months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release. Dwight’s son Steven (then 46 and a father of three) was sentenced to one year and one day in prison — also to be followed by three years of supervised release.

The Obama Justice Department was having none of that and promptly appealed Judge Hogan’s ruling to the infamous U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the most “progressive” and activist federal court in the land. Not surprisingly, they found a Ninth Circuit judge whose conscience was sufficiently conditioned as not to share Judge Hogan’s shock at the injustice of the prosecution. The full five-year sentences were handed down to the newly minted “terrorists,” who were then summarily ordered back to prison in 2016.

It was outrage over this injustice that led ranchers and supporters from across the country to rally to the Hammonds’ cause in eastern Oregon’s Harney County. Among those who came were Ammon and



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Ryan Bundy, sons of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, whose own conflicts with federal bureaucrats had resulted in the now-famous Bunkerville standoff with authorities in 2014. The Oregon protests evolved into the January-February occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which ended with Arizona rancher [LaVoy Finicum](#) being shot to death by an agent of the FBI and Oregon state troopers.

On Tuesday, July 10, the White House press office issued a [release](#) stating:

Today, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Grants of Clemency (Full Pardons) for Dwight Lincoln Hammond, Jr., and his son, Steven Hammond. The Hammonds are multi-generation cattle ranchers in Oregon imprisoned in connection with a fire that leaked onto a small portion of neighboring public grazing land. The evidence at trial regarding the Hammonds' responsibility for the fire was conflicting, and the jury acquitted them on most of the charges.

“At the Hammonds' original sentencing,” the statement continued, “the judge noted that they are respected in the community and that imposing the mandatory minimum, 5-year prison sentence would ‘shock the conscience’ and be ‘grossly disproportionate to the severity’ of their conduct. As a result, the judge imposed significantly lesser sentences. The previous administration, however, filed an overzealous appeal that resulted in the Hammonds being sentenced to five years in prison. This was unjust.”

The White House further noted:

Dwight Hammond is now 76 years old and has served approximately three years in prison. Steven Hammond is 49 and has served approximately four years in prison. They have also paid \$400,000 to the United States to settle a related civil suit. The Hammonds are devoted family men, respected contributors to their local community, and have widespread support from their neighbors, local law enforcement, and farmers and ranchers across the West. Justice is overdue for Dwight and Steven Hammond, both of whom are entirely deserving of these Grants of Executive Clemency.

Not surprisingly, the “progressive” (and virulently anti-Trump) *Huffington Post* promptly found a critic to condemn the president's act of clemency. Jennifer Rokala, executive director of the Center for Western Priorities (CWP), was quoted by *HuffPo* as saying that the pardon sent a “dangerous message to America's park rangers, wildland firefighters, law enforcement officers, and public lands managers. President Trump, at the urging of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, has once again sided with lawless extremists who believe that public land does not belong to all Americans.”

Rokala and the other green extremists at the CWP receive their principal funding from Eric Kessler, who uses his [New Venture Fund](#) to finance a host of left-wing environmental causes. Interestingly, none of the social justice “progressives” seemed to mind at all when President Obama pardoned unrepentant, still-defiant terrorist [Oscar Lopez Rivera](#), or President Bill Clinton's [1999 pardons](#) for 11 of Rivera's FALN terrorist comrades. Those are *genuine* terrorists, who planted bombs, blew up national monuments and tourist sites, and actually *killed* people. Yes, the bombers and murderers deserve clemency, but not the ranchers struggling to make a living and to feed the American people!

That's not the only example of liberal hypocrisy in this case. The *Huffington Post*, like the rest of the “mainstream” media, has been frothing for the past several weeks about the separation of children from parents by the Border Patrol and ICE. However, they reserve their compassion for illegal aliens. Hardworking, law-abiding American citizens such as the Hammonds, who have no criminal record, well, their plight is not worth consideration. No compassion for the children of Steven Hammond, or for the elderly Dwight Hammond, or for his wife Susie, who is in frail health and might not have seen her



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husband again if he had been forced to remain in prison. However, President Trump's pardon for the Hammonds will be celebrated by all Americans who treasure justice and who labor to roll back the oppressive and overreaching hand of Big Government and place it back into the shackles of the Constitution.

Photo of Dwight Hammond: AP Images

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