

## **‘I Still Don’t Believe It’: Hammond Family Feels Forgotten In Oregon Standoff**

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[This article comes from The Guardian](#)

by Sam Levin

As the occupation in their name fuels a media circus, Susie Hammond’s husband and son are 800 miles away – victims, many say, of an unjust prosecution.

When Susie Hammond talks to her husband Dwight on the phone, the short calls are often filled with moments of silence. Dwight, who celebrated his 74th birthday on Wednesday, is locked up in a federal prison in southern California, more than 800 miles from his home in Harney County, eastern Oregon.

“He can’t hear very good on the phone,” said Susie, 74, sitting in the living room of her house on a snow-covered street in the small town of Burns.

Because neither wants to upset each other, they do not discuss their struggles.

“If he thinks I’m going to be worried about him, he doesn’t talk about it,” said Susie, her eyes welling with tears. “I do the same. So there’s kind of dead time on the line. It’s very hard.”

Two weeks ago, Dwight and Susie’s son Steven, 46, began a five-year prison sentence for arson offenses prosecutors said the two ranchers committed on federal land. Their imprisonment inspired an armed militia of rightwing activists, most from outside Oregon, to [storm a federal wildlife refuge](#) in protest of government land-use regulations and the treatment of the Hammonds.

The [occupation of the Malheur national wildlife refuge](#) has continued to make international headlines and [create divisions](#) among the residents of rural Harney County. With the occupation entering its third week

with no end in sight, trivial controversies, [political spats](#), [arrivals of armed “patriot” groups](#) and [bizarre publicity stunts](#) have dominated local and national news.

Largely left behind in the media circus is a locally beloved ranching family torn apart by a prosecution [commentators across the political spectrum](#) say was cruel and unjust.

“I still don’t believe it,” Susie Hammond said, adding that she refuses to accept the idea that her husband of 56 years and her youngest son could now spend half a decade behind bars. “We just go day by day.”

Close friends of the Hammonds – some of whom grew up alongside Steven and have been neighbors for decades – say they have done everything they can to keep the spotlight on the father and son locked up in federal correctional institution.

But the cries for freedom for the Hammonds have sometimes been almost entirely absent from press events of [militia leader Ammon Bundy](#) and the news reports that follow.

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