ADDRESSING THE COSTS TO LOCAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE MALHEUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

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OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for 32 days armed militants have occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, Oregon. Acting on behalf of a misguided anti-public lands agenda and against the wishes of the local community, these extremists have endangered lives, damaged property, and disrupted society.

The armed takeover of a federal facility is simply not the way we do things in Oregon, and is not how things have been done at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge—a national treasure cherished by birders and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts and a model of collaboration and partnership with the local community.

The situation has been allowed to continue for far too long, and the costs of this dramatic and dangerous incident will be innumerable to the federal government, the Bums Paiute Tribe, the state, and the local community.

One particular manifestation of this cost is the financial expense to state and local law enforcement, which has spent an estimated $100,000 per week responding to this incident.

This is why, today, I am introducing a bill to help assuage some of the financial hardship borne by state and local taxpayers in protecting the community during this challenging time.

Because the incident involves a federal facility, the federal government made decisions about the timing and manner of addressing this ordeal. Ultimately, those decisions have been very expensive for Oregon and the local community. My bill will allow the federal government to ease this burden within 180 days by reimbursing reasonable costs associated with state and local law enforcement's response to this incident. Under my bill, the federal government will have the authority to pursue civil action seeking to recover those costs from the armed militia members to make sure taxpayers aren't on the hook.

Placing the burden of these costs on the militants is the right thing to do. It will send a strong signal that an armed takeover of a federal facility is unacceptable and will result in consequences. In the meantime, however, these communities already face resource constraints and an immediate federal reimbursement will help to address at least some of the hardships caused by this irresponsible and unfortunate incident.