

**Nevada Rancher Defends Remarks Over Blacks Being Better Under Slavery; Loses Supporters**

**News**

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LAS VEGAS (AP) -- A Nevada rancher who became a conservative folk hero for standing up to the government in a fight over grazing rights lost some of his staunch defenders Thursday after wondering aloud whether blacks might have had it better under slavery.



Republican politicians from around the country who have rallied to Cliven Bundy's defense in recent weeks denounced the comments and distanced themselves from the rancher, including potential 2016 presidential contender Sen. Rand Paul and Nevada Sen. Dean Heller. Democrats were quick to pounce on the comments and label Bundy a racist.

Bundy has gone from a little-known rancher and melon farmer in rural Nevada to a national political star since he resisted the federal government's attempts to round up his cattle from federal land because he hadn't paid grazing fees for two decades. His supporters, especially those on the right, have praised him for standing up to what they believe is a heavy-handed federal government, and several armed militia members traveled to his ranch to back Bundy.

His comments were first published in The New York Times on Wednesday, but he did little to tamp down the controversy as he sought to address the public outrage on Thursday.

Bundy was quoted in a Times story referring to black people as "the Negro" and recalling a time decades ago when he drove past homes in North Las Vegas and saw black people who "didn't have nothing to do." He said he wondered if they were "better off as slaves" than "under government subsidy."

On Thursday during an outdoor news conference near his ranch 80 miles from Las Vegas, he echoed the same sentiment: "Are they slaves to charities and government subsidized homes? And are they slaves when their daughters are having abortions and their sons are in the prisons? This thought goes back a long time."

A statement on the official Bundy Ranch Facebook page Thursday said that Bundy was a "good man, he loves all people, he is not a racist man." Bundy explained that he wasn't saying anyone should be enslaved today.

Politicians who had defended Bundy quickly issued statements condemning the remarks.

"His remarks on race are offensive, and I wholeheartedly disagree with him," said Paul, a Kentucky senator.

Heller, who last week called Bundy defenders "patriots" for their stand against the government, "completely disagrees with Mr. Bundy's appalling and racist statements, and condemns them in the most strenuous way," said his spokeswoman, Chandler Smith.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat who last week called Bundy supporters "domestic terrorists," also spoke out against Bundy's words.

"Today, Bundy revealed himself to be a hateful racist," Reid said. "But by denigrating people who work hard and play by the rules while he mooches off public land, he also revealed himself to be a hypocrite."

Bundy says he doesn't recognize federal authority over lands around his property that his cattle have grazed on for years.

The Bureau of Land Management claims the cattle are trespassing on fragile Gold Butte habitat set aside for the endangered desert tortoise, and that Bundy has racked up some \$1.1 million in fees and penalties since 1993.

Supporters rushed to Bundy's ranch after a YouTube video showed federal agents using a stun gun on Bundy's son during a BLM roundup of the family's cattle. The resulting armed standoff became so tense that BLM agents and contractors called off the weeklong roundup, released about 350 animals back to Bundy, and left the area April 12.

Federal officials have said the agency would pursue unspecified administrative and judicial remedies, but BLM officials have not provided details.