

# The Washington Post

Morning Mix

## Michele Fiore, the gun-toting, calendar-posing politician who negotiated the Ore. occupiers' surrender

By **Michael E. Miller** February 11 at 5:13 AM

It was the most cinematic of moments, and Michele Fiore was not going to miss it.

As helicopters swirled overhead and heavily armed FBI agents crept closer, the four frantic, fearful anti-government occupiers still inside the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon heard a familiar voice on the telephone line.

“We’re putting our big-girl panties on now, and we are taking America back.”

Michele Fiore to the rescue.

From the Portland airport five hours away, Fiore, 45, proceeded to act as the occupiers’ de facto negotiator, at times agreeing with their radical views and at others, calming them down. The Nevada state assemblywoman and occupation supporter said she had spoken to the FBI and received assurances that the federal government wouldn’t invade Wednesday night. And when one of the occupiers worried that government snipers were going to kill everyone inside the cabin, Fiore insisted everything would be all right.

“We’re going to make it through this, and we’re going to write about it,” she said on the occupiers’ live-streamed conference call, monitored at one point by about 64,000 people.

[\*Cliven Bundy arrested in Portland as Oregon occupiers say they will surrender Thursday\*](#)

By night’s end, the occupiers tentatively agreed to turn themselves in Thursday morning, largely thanks to Fiore’s intervention, though that deal conceivably could be in jeopardy after [the arrest of Cliven Bundy](#), the Nevada rancher at the center of an armed standoff with federal officials in 2014.

“Fiore has really given the holdouts a sense of purpose,” [tweeted John Sepulvado](#), a reporter covering the standoff for Oregon Public Broadcasting. “Regardless of what you think of her politics — [she] clearly diffused the

situation.”

If the standoff ends peacefully Thursday morning, Fiore will emerge as the most unlikely of saviors.

The brash, blond, Las Vegas grandma is one of the most colorful, controversial political people in the country. She has posed in racy wall calendars with an assortment of semiautomatic rifles. She once wrote, produced and starred in her own movie.

She is a staunch Republican who wears cowboy boots and carries a pistol at all times — even in gun-free zones, she says — yet she also backs same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization. She is a fiscal conservative who at one point owed the IRS more than \$1 million. And she is a congressional candidate who keeps saying outrageous things, often about shooting people in the head.

Fiore has said she is “not okay with Syrian refugees” and has offered to “shoot ’em in the head myself,” before later backtracking. She also sponsored a bill to let students carry concealed guns on Nevada campuses, promising that rape rates would drop “once these sexual predators get a bullet in their head.”

She once [called](#) an African American lawmaker “colored.”

She even believes that cancer is a fungus that can be cured with saltwater and baking soda.

Rather than a voice of reason, Michele Fiore more often has been a shrill cry of outrage.

Fiore’s background is not your usual GOP fare. She was born in Brooklyn to a liberal, lesbian mother who raised Michele around equality parades in the late 1970s, according to [the Las Vegas Sun](#). Her uncles were NYPD officers who taught her to fire a gun.

When her mother moved to Las Vegas in the late 1980s, Fiore did, too, attending college but never graduating. She and her mother started a home health-care company called Always There 4 You, but it’s no longer there for anyone after shutting down last year and having its license revoked by state regulators, [according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal](#). (She blamed the shutdown on Big Government.)

She always harbored higher aspirations, though, and in 2005 she wrote, produced and starred in a movie called “Siren” about a humble housewife who tries to make it as a singer.

“In the role she wrote for herself, Fiore-Kaime, portrays Storm Fagan, a wife and mother who endures the slings and arrows of music industry skeptics to follow her dreams of rock stardom — Fiore-Kaime’s real childhood dream,” [the Los Angeles Times wrote](#), using Fiore’s former last name.

## Siren (The Movie) Trailer



Five years later, Fiore traded Hollywood dreams for political ambition, running for Congress as part of the tea party wave roiling Washington. She was trounced in a primary, but two years later she easily won her district’s open state Assembly seat.

Fiore proved herself a powerful but unpredictable political force during her freshman year in Carson City, sponsoring no less than 95 bills — more than 16 percent of all bills filed, according to [the Sun](#).

“I didn’t get the memo that says you’re supposed to sit down, shut up and behave,” she told the newspaper.

She was the only Republican to vote for lifting the state’s ban on same-sex marriage and for legalizing marijuana. But she also earned an A+ rating from the National Rifle Association — and national headlines — by sponsoring

an ill-fated bill to allow college students to carry concealed weapons on campus.

“If these young, hot little girls on campus have a firearm, I wonder how many men will want to assault them,” she told [the New York Times](#). “The sexual assaults that are occurring would go down once these sexual predators get a bullet in their head.”

The eyebrow-raising quote, however, would soon be eclipsed by Fiore’s far stranger statements.



**Michele Fiore**  
@VoteFiore

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A year ago, Fiore proposed a "Right to Try" bill in Nevada that would allow patients diagnosed with one year or less to live to seek potential remedies that have not received final approval from the Food and Drug Administration. A version of the bill enjoyed broad support and eventually became law.

While talking about the bill on her radio show, however, Fiore claimed that cancer is a fungus that can be cured with saltwater and baking soda. (It's not, according to [scientific consensus](#).)

“If you have cancer, which I believe is a fungus, and we can put a PICC line into your body and we’re flushing with, say, salt water, sodium carbonate, through that line and flushing out the fungus,” she said.

In December, as debate raged over whether the United States should accept Syrian refugees, Fiore was asked about accepting asylum seekers in Nevada.

“What, are you kidding me? I’m about to fly to Paris and shoot ’em in the head myself,” Fiore told [local radio station KDWN](#), adding: “I am not okay with Syrian refugees. I’m not okay with terrorists. I’m okay with putting them down, blacking them out, just put a piece of brass in their ocular cavity and end their miserable life. I’m good with that.”

She later backtracked, saying that she “was not talking about the refugees” but rather terrorists when she offered to shoot them in the head.

For the most part, however, Fiore is unapologetic about her off-the-cuff style. She has admitted to owing the IRS more than \$1 million in unpaid taxes, but she blamed it on a thieving employee and her ex-husband’s bad accounting. She even lobbied, unsuccessfully, to stay on as chairwoman of the Nevada Assembly’s Taxation Committee.

She has posed in [calendars wearing racy outfits](#) and holding semiautomatic guns. And she recently sent out a Christmas card showing her and her family dressed in matching outfits and clutching weapons. Fiore was widely criticized for the photo, which featured her young grandson holding a gun.



**Michele Fiore**

about 2 months ago



It's up to Americans to protect America. We're just your ordinary American family.-With love & liberty, Michele

7,912

164

7,708

"I am 100 percent politically incorrect, and I say bad words," she [told the Sun](#).

With her telegenic looks, conservative credentials and carefree style, Fiore is a peroxide-blond Sarah Palin.

That political incorrectness has dovetailed with the Bundy family's budding rancher militia movement in the West. When Bundy launched his standoff with federal officials over his more than \$1 million unpaid grazing fees in April 2014, Fiore was one of more than 1,000 supporters to show up in Bunkerville, Nev.

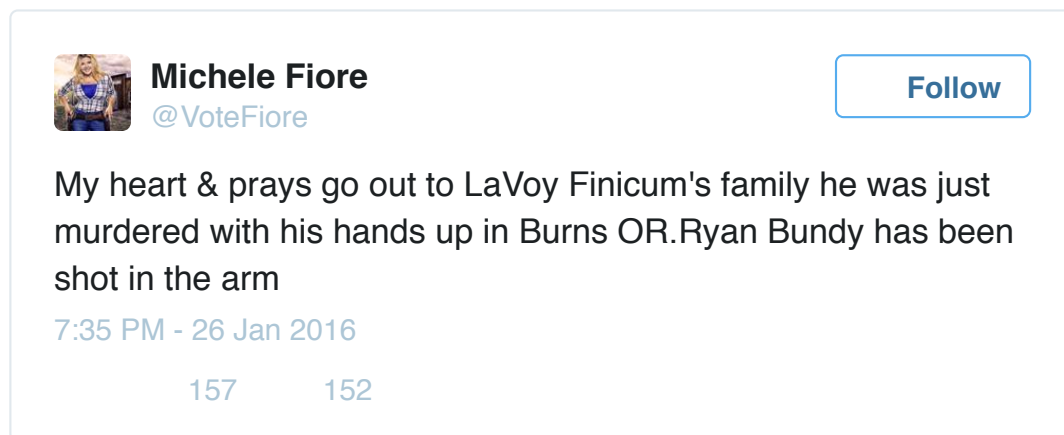
“Generally, when our federal government comes in armed, we are expecting a bigger problem, maybe terrorists crossing the border, not an unpaid bill,” she told MSNBC.

Her interviews during the first Bundy standoff made Fiore a conservative darling, and last year she announced she would run for Nevada’s 3rd Congressional District.

When Bundy’s sons, Ammon and Ryan, launched another standoff in early January by occupying the Malheur refuge near Burns, Ore., Fiore again came to the family’s backing.

She gave more interviews, tweeted words of support for the occupiers and blamed the federal government for the standoff.

When Arizona rancher LaVoy Finicum was killed during a confrontation with state and federal officials on Jan. 26, Fiore tweeted that he had been “murdered with his hands up.”



Even after an FBI video of the confrontation showed Finicum driving away from a traffic stop at high speed, nearly hitting an officer, slamming into a snowbank, exiting his car and then reaching toward his pocket, where he had a gun, Fiore said she had “questions” about the “ambush.” She also called on the FBI to release body- and dash-cam footage of the fatal traffic stop.

On Monday, Fiore [announced](#) that she was heading to Oregon on Wednesday to meet with legislators and demand they push for the release of the Bundy brothers, who were arrested during the Jan. 26 traffic stop.

When she arrived at the Portland airport Wednesday evening, she found that the situation at the Malheur refuge, where four holdouts remained, was rapidly disintegrating. One of the occupiers had ridden an ATV outside the



perimeter set up by the FBI, prompting federal officials to close in on the cabin.

From the airport, Fiore began conducting a complex balancing act, calming down the terrified occupiers while telling them that she shared their outrage and also reaching out to the FBI to prevent a shootout.



**John Sepulvado**

@JohnLGC

Follow

.@OPB has confirmed the stream from the camp is accurate.

7:06 PM - 10 Feb 2016 · Portland, OR, United States

121

85

“We’re not leaving until you guys get here tomorrow,” occupier Sean Anderson told Fiore over the phone.

“Otherwise, they’re going to have to f—ing kill us.”

“People are watching,” she reassured them. As 64,000 people across the country listened to the live-streaming conference call, Fiore soothed Anderson and his hysterical wife — who yelled to the FBI agents to “kill us and get it over with” — asking them to pray as she drove toward the refuge with Franklin Graham, son of the evangelical Rev. Billy Graham.

Just before 9:30 p.m. local time, there came a surprise twist in the 40-day standoff, a reported agreement that the occupiers would surrender in the morning.

For Fiore, it was the Hollywood moment that had long eluded her, even if it was in an uncharacteristic role as an FBI go-between.

[According to Molly Young](#), a reporter for the Oregonian newspaper, Fiore said she got to the refuge at 7 a.m. Thursday to coordinate the occupiers' surrender.

The planned surrender could still fall apart, however, especially as the occupiers said they had been told Cliven Bundy would be there as they turned themselves in. Bundy was arrested by the FBI on Wednesday night.

Either way, Fiore is likely to be there Thursday morning, center stage in her cowboy boots.

### **Read also:**

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