

Supporters of Christian conservative 51st state hold bake sale to raise money

By ASSOCIATED PRESS // May 24, 2019



Washington State Rep. Matt Shea, R-Spokane Valley, shown in an April 22, 2019, file photo, has championed the movement to create a 51st state. At the Liberty State Gala on Thursday in Spokane Valley, Shea spoke of the cultural and political differences between eastern and western Washington, denied the existence of global warming, and claimed the United States is “a Christian nation” under siege by atheists and Communists. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren) Ted S. Warren AP

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash.

Proponents of creating a 51st state held a bake sale to raise money for their cause.

The Spokesman-Review reports that supporters of the proposed Christian conservative state, which would span parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, raised money by auctioning pies and other desserts.

The Liberty State Gala drew about 200 people in the city of Spokane Valley on Thursday evening.

Speakers included Washington State Rep. Matt Shea, a Spokane Valley Republican who has championed the Liberty State movement.

Shea spoke of the cultural and political differences between eastern and western Washington, denied the existence of global warming, and claimed the United States is “a Christian nation” under siege by atheists and Communists.

Spokane City Councilman Mike Fagen and county Prosecutor Larry Haskell also attended.



THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Saturday, May 25, 2019 Spokane, Washington Est. May 19, 1883

Liberty State supporters raise funds at event after tense 'silent protest' by ex-Matt Shea backers

UPDATED: Fri., May 24, 2019



In a tense standoff at the Liberty State Gala, armed security guards and Liberty State activist John Christina, right, confront former members of Rep. Matt Shea's inner circle, including Tanner Rowe (with tattoos). The group peacefully left after being told to leave by Spokane County sheriff's deputies on Thursday, May 23, 2019, at the CenterPlace Regional Event Center in Spokane Valley. (Colin Mulvany / The Spokesman-Review)

By Chad Sokol

A fundraising event for the proposed creation of a 51st state called Liberty started on a tense note Thursday evening as onetime loyalists of state Rep. Matt Shea held what they called a "silent protest" and stood toe-to-toe with armed security guards.

The Liberty State Gala drew about 200 people to the CenterPlace Regional Event Center in Spokane Valley. Supporters of the new Christian conservative state – which would span parts of Washington and Oregon as well as Idaho, Montana and Wyoming – raised money by auctioning pies and other desserts.

The lineup of speakers included Shea, a Spokane Valley Republican who has championed the Liberty State movement; Spokane City Councilman Mike Fagan; Spokane City Council

candidate Tim Benn; and Loren Culp, the police chief in Republic, Washington, who made national headlines when he pledged not to enforce a controversial gun control initiative that voters passed in November.

County Prosecutor Larry Haskell, former Treasurer Rob Chase and gun activist Anthony Bosworth also were in attendance, as were Barry and Anne Byrd, who lead the Marble Community Fellowship in northern Stevens County. (In 1988, Barry Byrd helped pen a Christian Identity manifesto that referred to Jews as “anti-Christ” and condemned interracial marriage, though the Byrds have since tried to distance themselves from racist ideology.)

At one point during her own speech Thursday, Shea’s legislative assistant, Rene’ Holaday, said supporters of the 51st state idea were bound by a common sentiment: “It’s either going to be bloodshed or Liberty State.”

A brief confrontation and shouting match occurred at the start of the event when Tanner Rowe, Jay Pounder and about eight other men entered the building and tried to take seats among the crowd. They were stopped by organizers of the event, including John Christina, who has worked in the county treasurer’s office, and members of the militialike security team, who formed a row in front of the seating area with pistols holstered at their sides.

The conservative protesters were later peacefully escorted off the premises by two sheriff’s deputies. Rowe and Pounder once worked as bodyguards for Shea but have since defected and decried his views as dangerous fearmongering.

Shortly before Shea’s re-election last fall, Rowe leaked a document authored by Shea titled “Biblical Basis for War,” which condemned abortion and same-sex marriage and called for the killing of those who flout “biblical law.” Shea has insisted the document was nothing more than sermon notes on the Old Testament.

Pounder followed suit in April, sharing copies of a 2017 private group chat involving Shea with several news outlets, including the Guardian and The Spokesman-Review. The chats showed that Shea proposed conducting background checks on political opponents, and that he didn’t object when others suggested violent attacks on leftist protesters.

Outside the event center, Pounder said he was surprised that Shea’s supporters would not let him and his associates listen to the presentations.

“It affects me. It affects everyone in the state. And the idea is, people just need to be aware of what’s going on in their government,” Pounder said. “We have no ill intent towards Matt Shea. We just want to be aware of what’s going on. That’s it. We wanted people of all different walks and backgrounds to come and listen to their presentation.”

Shea delivered the last speech of the night, covering many of his usual talking points. He denied the existence of global warming, instead blaming seasonal wildfires on changes in forest management practices. He spoke of the cultural and political differences between Eastern and Western Washington. He claimed the United States is “a Christian nation” under siege by atheists and Communists.

To prove his point, Shea shared a photo of a small group of leftist antifa, or anti-fascist, protesters on the steps of the Capitol in Olympia. One was holding a red-and-yellow flag bearing the hammer-and-sickle symbol of the Soviet Union.

“The Communists and atheists – those that are responsible for the deaths of more people than any other belief system in the history of the world – unfurled their flag on the Capitol steps this last spring,” he said.

Shea then shared screenshots of threats he had received as evidence that he and his supporters are under attack from ominous political forces.

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To learn more about Liberty State, go [here](#)

