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The Man Who Decided Things Are Not Going to be All Right

On Wednesday, May 17, from 6 to 8 P.M., at Bert and Ernie's, 361 N. Last Chance Gulch in Helena, 350 Montana will introduce Leonard Higgins, an ordinary hero. Higgins will also speak in Missoula and in Whitefish.

There are many kinds of heroes. We know the swashbuckler, the Hollywood alpha who bests all his adversaries. We know the anti-hero, the Don Quixotes, who manage their quest in spite of their misbegotten selves. Our favorite at 350 Montana, given the current state of the climate and our Deniers-in-Chief, is the everyman, the average American citizen who steps forward with great moral courage.

Helena folks have an opportunity to meet one of these brave souls, who recently took personal risks to defend our planet, our environment, our quality of life ... and, if you read the scientific literature, maybe all life as we know it.

The background is that, on October 11, 2016, five ordinary citizens chose to act to maintain their moral beliefs commensurate with the science of the climate crisis. In the face of the abject failure of public policy to deal with climate change, they closed valves on the five pipelines carrying Alberta tar sands crude oil into the United States.

Higgins, Jay O'Hara, Ken Ward, Emily Johnston, and Annette Klapstein shut five major cross-border pipelines in four states carrying millions of barrels of tar sands crude. The valve turners simultaneously entered valve stations in remote locations 1,600 miles across four northern U.S. states.

They were supporting the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which was trying to protect its water and land from the \$3.7 billion Dakota Access pipeline carrying oil to the Gulf Coast.

Fifteen minutes before shutting the valves, the valve turners called operating companies and emergency services. In response, the firms shut off the oil. The simple plan highlighted the vulnerability of energy infrastructure and stunned policy makers and energy executives.

Higgins turned off a pipeline in Chouteau County, Montana, near Coal Banks Landing. He faces up to 10 years in prison. After his December 6 arraignment he said the possibility of incarceration paled in comparison to the prospect of climate change. "Bottom line: we're facing a far greater threat than prison," he said.

Retired after a 30-year career as an IT specialist for the State of Oregon, Higgins awaits a July 18 trial in Fort Benton. He hopes to present to a jury of his peers a "necessity defense," that, in a democracy, when our representatives fail to act in the face of an impending disaster like climate change, ordinary citizens have a duty to act, to save themselves, their loved ones, and the general public.

As this article from Leonard's hometown newspaper --

http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/spinning-the-wheel-corvallis-valve-turner-gambles-climate-protests-will/article_7825862a-b2d5-5461-ba18-8a0e2c7c5d9f.html --

suggests, he is a gentle, well-intentioned father and retired civil servant who has put his future on the line to bring attention to our climate crisis.

Jay O'Hara puts Higgins' talk next Wednesday in context. "Montana is as good a place as any to have that conversation," he says. "It's a conversation we need to have in the heart of America with average, everyday citizens."

350 Montana wants to bring folks together to learn about the moral grounds for climate actions, pay tribute to their bravery, and raise money for their legal defense. Because . . .

Every once in a while—not often enough, mind you—some very brave souls put themselves in harm’s way to right the wrongs of our time. *They are our ordinary heroes.*

For more information please visit: www.350montana.org and www.facebook.com/climatedirection/

NOTE TO MEDIA: Leonard Higgins is available for interviews via telephone or in person. Please schedule interviews with *350 Montana*.