By: Quinn Kelly

Two protesters were detained and trespassed from the Oregon State Capitol on September 8th, after dropping a 20 ft hand-painted banner in the capitol rotunda, demanding that Tina Kotek stop the lithium mining proposals planned for the McDermitt Caldera in Southern Oregon.

About 15 people gathered from Portland, Eugene and Southern Oregon during legislative days to bring the problem of this mine right into Tina Kotek's lap. For over five years People of Red Mountain, a group of Paiute, Shoshone and Bannock people from the Fort McDermitt area, have been organizing to stop lithium mines on their land. The McDermitt Caldera is a place of cultural, ecological and spiritual significance to them, containing important wildlife habitat, ancestral food and medicine as well as sacred sites where they honor ancestors. The state of Oregon has ignored them every step of the way, even going so far as to approve the permits for exploratory drilling at the proposed mine site in August, despite widespread dissent from tribal and environmentalist communities.

"Tina Kotek, you are ignoring tribal communities who are speaking out about the harm and danger of these mines. We are bringing this struggle to Salem to your doorstep in solidarity with people who are impacted by these proposals," Portland resident and Portland Rising Tide member Jesse Hammond said in a statement. "We need you to pay attention to the danger lithium mines will cause to people, water and land who need protection and are being excluded from these vital decisions about their lives and well-being."

The protesters sang, chanted, handed out leaflets and dropped a 20 ft banner from the rotunda balcony. The Oregon State Trooper presence was immediate, as they attempted several times to rip the banner out of protester hands and gave repeated trespassing orders. Despite this, the protesters remained strong and united, refused to obey and held the space of the rotunda for 30 minutes before they were finally detained, trespassed and walked out of the building chanting. Their banner was taken by police and returned to them outside.

The lithium mines in Southern Oregon follow similar projects on the Nevada side of the McDermitt Caldera, which are much farther along. The Nevada mining project is projected to use 1.7 billion gallons of water each year. The Oregon mining project was developed in December 2025, allowing HiTech Minerals Inc. to drill for lithium at up to 168 sites on 7200 acres of federal land. Demand for lithium is increasing to power electric vehicles, batteries, data centers and military equipment; meaning that more wildlands and their human, plant and animal inhabitants will be threatened. Coincidentally, there was a simultaneous protest going on at the Capitol the same day pressuring law makers and the Governor to stop data centers in Oregon.

"From hyper-scale data centers to lithium and uranium mines, Big Tech's plans for Oregon are an attack on our precious water resources, Indigenous lands, and the climate," said Allie Rosenbluth, a community organizer from Jackson County. "We need to come together and stand up to this."