

It's about time

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CChEERS ... to Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, both R-Idaho. They are among 98 Republicans and 18 Democratic House members insisting President Obama get congressional authorization before launching strikes against Syria.

"While the Founders wisely gave the president the authority to act in emergencies, they foresaw the need to ensure public debate - and the active engagement of Congress - prior to committing U.S. military assets," contends the letter authored by Rep. Scott Rigell, R-Va. "Engaging our military in Syria when no direct threat to the United States exists and without prior congressional authorization would violate the separation of powers that is clearly delineated in the Constitution."

As constitutional scholar and Andrus Center for Public Policy Director David Adler has argued for years, presidents, beginning with Harry Truman, have usurped war-making powers specifically held by Congress.

Article 1, Section 8 gives Congress the responsibility to "declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water."

The War Powers Resolution of 1973 requires hostilities to be imminent before a president can launch military operations.

Whatever you think of the tragedy underway in Syria, it's fair to ask: How does this threaten the security of the United States? And if Syria's use of chemical weapons justifies a military excursion, wouldn't a spirited congressional debate strengthen Obama's case - and perhaps persuade a war-weary American public that intervening now is in their best interests?

JEERS ... to Lewiston Mayor Kevin Poole. Monday, he accused Councilors Thrya Stevenson and Clinton Daniel of being "cowards."

Come on.

Poole is lathered up about the way Stevenson and Daniel waited until the final stages of the city's budget preparation - when the 3 percent tax increase was up for a final vote - to challenge it.

Where were they when the council was marking up the budget during the summer work sessions? Instead, they engaged in what Poole characterized as "a series of last-minute ambushes."

Nobody is going to accuse Stevenson and Daniel of being noble.

Self-serving?

Sure.

Opportunistic?

Pandering?

No argument there.

Grandstanding?

Yep.

Playing it safe?

Finding a convenient reason to vote no after a coalition to pass the budget had already coalesced?

If the shoe fits.

But walking into a public meeting and taking a stand - even if it's fueled more by ego than principle - is not cowardly. Stevenson and Daniel were not hiding in the bathroom when the vote was called.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. The governor accomplished what state school Superintendent Tom Luna failed to do.

Luna pushed his discredited reform package down people's throats - and get repudiated at the polls.

Otter brought together a broad based, 31-member education reform task force. Last week, it outlined a series of overhauls, but topping the list was restoring \$82.5 million schools relied upon to pay everything from the heating bill to textbooks - and boosting teacher pay by \$254 million during the next six years.

That could cause heartburn for a governor who has insisted on holding government spending below the inflation rate.

But Otter pledged his support.

"We know it's going to be roughly 350 million bucks," Otter told the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce Tuesday. "We ... know we can't do that in one year, we can't do it in two years or maybe three years. But what we can do is set ourselves on a course that we can accomplish so much each year, and ... four or five years out, we've accomplished the entire package."

Of course, words go only so far. Otter has to push a Republican-dominated Legislature that simply detests teachers.

For a governor whose legislative record involves more losses than wins, it's going to be a challenge.

JEERS ... to Idaho State Board of Education. A five-member majority - including President Don Soltman of Twin Lakes and Bill Goesling of Moscow - just endorsed the idea of spending money Idaho does not have to train lawyers it does not need.

The University of Idaho wants to add a second year to its Boise-based third-year program. The UI has some compelling reasons - chief among them that the center of law and government is 300 miles south of the main campus at Moscow.

The problem is one of choices and resources. Idaho higher education still has 17 percent - or \$49 million - less state support than it did five years ago.

Even with a modest bump in the number of seats Idaho is buying at the University of Washington medical school, the state still struggles to find enough doctors. The state could expand its software engineering program by more than 100 graduates.

But lawyers? Says the Bureau of Labor Statistics: "... More students are graduating from law school each year than there are jobs available."

CHEERS ... to former U.S. House Speaker Tom Foley, D-Wash. Beginning in 1964, Foley was elected to 14 terms from eastern Washington and became speaker in 1989.

Defeated for re-election in 1994, Foley served as the U.S. ambassador to Japan.

Reported to be in poor health, Foley is drawing some richly deserved accolades for a career marked by bringing people of different views together toward a workable solution.

That's something you rarely see anymore in Washington, D.C. - M.T.