

# Yikes! Arabs in Elk River, Basques in Boise

**Jim Fisher/Lewiston Tribune**

Circle the pickup trucks and four-wheelers, Idahoans. Your state is under assault.

Well, under observation at any rate.

That is all it took for Elk River Mayor Jim Martin to sound the alarm when some people Martin described both as "undesirables" and "Arabs" came to town and started behaving strangely.

How strangely? They took photographs. When one of visitors started shooting snapshots of the town's business district, Martin took notice because "people don't just walk up and down taking pictures."

Other strange activities reported from at least three such visits included four Arabs who came to town and drove up and down the street in a "new car." The following day, a single man parked a van near the post office and stayed in it with a dog for three to four hours. And finally, Martin told city council members, "Four more Arab people came in, pooped around a little bit in Elk River, then they went out to RV Merrill Park and built a big fire, and I guess it was a big one."

Talk about suspicious.

As Martin was warning council members about the visitors to Elk River, some Boiseans were set to begin Jaialdi, a five-day celebration of the culture that immigrants from the Basque regions of Spain and France brought with them to the American West. If the name of that event looks suspicious, there's a good reason.

It isn't even in English.

But Boiseans have grown so lackadaisical about the Basques pooping around their town they not only tolerate the Basques' presence, they elect them to public office. Why, Martin's counterpart in the capital city, Mayor Dave Bieter, is himself a Basque.

Despite what happens in big cities, though, rural Idahoans have not lost their bearings. Earlier this year, state Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, refused to join other members of her chamber as its day began with a Hindu invocation instead of one from a proper religion. Hinduism, she explained, is "a false faith with false gods."

Asked later to apologize, Nuxoll refused, saying all such invocations should be Christian because "our state constitution and federal constitution are based on Christianity."

In truth, Idaho's constitution was based on a little more than that. The people who wrote it were so fearful of influence by adherents to one brand of Christianity, Mormonism, they prohibited

Mormons from voting. Or at least, they tried. In that instance, Idaho's founding document was, shall we say, a little less Christian than the U.S. Constitution.

Today, Mormons are treated around the state much as Basques are treated in Boise. And yes, some are elected to public office, including two of the state's four-member congressional delegation.

If any get the notion to visit Elk River, however, they might be wise to leave the cameras, new cars and fire starters at home. - J.F.