

Laced in venom

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho state Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard. As far as she's concerned, Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter is a wimp when it comes to keeping refugees of war-torn Syria out of the Gem State.

Otter merely asked the Obama administration for a time-out on refugee resettlement. Scott, on the other hand, has yielded to venom-laced paranoia. Here's some of what she said in an electronic legislative newsletter this week:

- "I'm talking about the impending influx of thousands of Muslim refugees."
- The nation is threatened by an "Islamic agenda of domination and takeover."
- "Islamic immigration is different from non-Muslim immigration."
- An Islamic "doctrine on migration called Al-Hijra" calls on Muslims to migrate as groups, keep separate and "grow until they are large enough to start demanding their 'rights' and specifically Shariah Law." It helps, Scott writes, that "they also traditionally have more children than Westerners."
- The Obama administration is "dumping thousands of Islamic refugees across 190 communities in what can clearly be called an intentional invasion of our country."

This is the language of scapegoating, of demonizing people, of casting them as less than human and justifying treating them differently. Would Scott dare make statements such as those about other minorities - Africans, Hispanics or Jews?

Which is precisely what Scott proposes to do. She wants Otter to call lawmakers back to Boise for a special session to "draft emergency legislation to address the refugee crisis." She also wants him to draft a second letter to President Obama because his first version wasn't strong enough.

Can you imagine waking up in a country where Scott was in charge?

You wouldn't recognize the place.

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. While Otter and other mostly Republican governors were raising red flags about keeping Syrian refugees out of their states, Inslee stood by America's traditional values of offering safety to victims of civil war and, yes, terrorism.

"Washington will continue to be a state that welcomes those seeking refuge from persecution, regardless of where they come from or the religion they practice," Inslee said. "We have been and will continue to be a state that embraces compassion and eschews fear mongering."

Inslee is following in the footsteps of former Washington Gov. Dan Evans. Forty years ago, the issue was the tide of refugees fleeing Vietnam. Among those resisting their resettlement was then-Calif. Gov. Jerry Brown.

Evans did just the reverse.

He engaged the machinery of state government to help refugees come to Washington - and implored ordinary citizens and faith-based groups to do the same.

Standing on human rights - especially when people are unnerved - is never easy. Invariably, however, it stands the test of time.

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Spending nearly five years in the Capitol Hill limelight is making Labrador imperious.

Tuesday, it was Breitbart reporter Julia Hahn's turn to endure one of his rants.

"I don't answer questions from you because you are not a truthful reporter," Labrador said. "And I will not answer any of your questions."

OK, you can argue whether the late conservative Andrew James Breitbart's creation is a legitimate news organization or a right-wing lobby. It certainly takes no prisoners. Even Labrador has felt its lash. Breitbart painted him as being soft on immigration - which would be news to immigration reform advocates.

But what was Hahn's offense?

Did she ask Labrador the proverbial loaded question?

No. At a "Conversation with Conservatives" forum, Hahn asked for a show of hands about who would suspend Muslim immigration into the U.S. Just the day before, Labrador said: "In the face of the malevolence of ISIS-directed attacks, it is only prudent to suspend resettlement until we establish reliable security protocols at home and abroad."

When the Huffington Post caught up with Labrador, he conceded he could have handled things more delicately. "I'm not feeling well today," he said.

But it's not the first time he has cut someone off for not showing him due deference. Who could forget his Oct. 26, 2012, debate put-down of Democratic challenger Jimmy Farris: "You keep saying you can work with Republicans. You don't even listen to Republicans. ... I had respect for (former Democratic Congressman) Walt Minnick. You don't have any respect."

CHEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo, both R-Idaho. You wouldn't expect to find them among the dozen largely moderate Republican senators who have joined with 41 Democrats to shore up support for the embattled Land and Water Conservation Fund.

But there they are - joining not only with people such as Washington Democrats Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray but also Massachusetts' Elizabeth Warren, New York's Chuck Schumer and Oregon's Ron Wyden.

The bipartisan coalition champions a 50-year-old program that draws royalties from offshore oil and gas leases and spends it toward conserving public places and watersheds. Often, it's a win-win situation. Dollars go toward conservation easements - keeping ranchers on the land - while precluding the prospect of development in sensitive areas. Such was the case with the 53 miles of river frontage along the Lower Salmon River Canyon.

But House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop, R-Utah, has other ideas. Thanks to him, the LWCF authorization has lapsed.

CHEERS ... to West Ada School Board member Russell Joki and his attorney, Robert Huntley of Boise. For three years, they have been wading through procedural delays and setbacks just to establish this point: The Idaho Constitution means what it says.

Before his election to the school board earlier this year, Joki argued the fees charged his grandchildren - two of them in kindergarten and one in high school - violated Idaho's promise of "a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools."

Fourth District Judge Richard Greenwood didn't make things easy. He restricted Joki's lawsuit to his own school district rather than broaden its impact statewide. But Monday, Greenwood agreed: "The question here is whether the defendant is providing a general, thorough and free education. ... The court concludes it is not."

Schools have resorted to these fees to replace dollars lawmakers have taken away. Now for the first time in 40 years, a judge essentially held those legislators to account. - M.T.