

Speak up, senator

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. Risch has become so adept at delivering his message of doom and gloom about the looming national debt that listening to it could throw you into cardiac arrest.

He did it again on Feb. 18, when he spoke to the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce. According to the Idaho Statesman, he said: "When I got there, the national debt was about \$10 trillion. Today, we are at about \$19 trillion. ... There is not the concerted effort that needs to be done to get this problem aligned. And you are not even hearing much of it in the presidential races this year."

Credit Risch for speaking up. But he's been in office seven years. Where's his plan?

What federal spending would he cut? Energy research? Federal land management?

What's his answer to the looming problems in Social Security and Medicare? Raising the retirement age? Increasing payroll taxes? Cutting benefits to affluent seniors?

To balance the budget without increased taxes is both mathematically and politically impossible.

Congressman Mike Simpson and Sen. Mike Crapo, both R-Idaho, at least forged alliances to talk about the idea. For that, both were named "Fiscal Heroes" by the Campaign to Fix the Debt in 2014.

Where's Risch been?

And how is the country supposed to pay for the aggressive foreign policy and defense posture Risch advocates?

Bemoaning the debt, pointing the finger at the Obama administration and pursuing an ideologically pure voting record works for Risch. He's maintained a solid hold on an office he once admitted doesn't require much heavy lifting.

But what's it doing for you?

JEERS ... to Idaho state Rep. Eric Redman, R-Athol. After two years in office, Redman introduced his maiden bill this month - and he literally reached in the muck.

Using template legislation - and talking points - provided by the American Public Policy Alliance, Redman has sponsored a bill aimed at prohibiting Idaho courts from considering foreign laws.

As in Sharia Law.

Since when did any Idaho judge deviate from federal and state law? The ACLU of Idaho combed over decades of Idaho court cases and could not find one instance.

Yet Redman - who faces both GOP primary and Democratic opposition for re-election - is playing the anti-Muslim card. He's circulating documents depicting hands severed as punishment for theft and the alleged imposition of Sharia Law in Europe.

That's the same ploy renegade Idaho lawmakers used last year. In the process, they nearly derailed the state's child support enforcement system,

Wednesday, witness after witness told the House State Affairs Committee Redman's bill could wreak havoc for Idahoans who were married abroad or who adopted children from another country.

What kind of politician scapegoats a beleaguered minority and places Idaho families in jeopardy on the eve of his re-election campaign?

CCheers ... to Idaho state Sen. Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow. First he got Senate Health and Welfare Committee Chairman Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls, to at least place the issue of expanding Medicaid coverage to 78,000 working poor Idahoans before a public hearing.

When Heider - and the rest of the GOP - refused to do anything more, Schmidt resigned from the panel that oversees Idaho's catastrophic insurance program, which covers medical bills indigent people cannot afford to pay.

Monday, Schmidt forced a showdown on the Senate floor. On a party-line vote, the GOP refused to pull the Medicaid expansion measure out of Heider's desk drawer.

Thursday, Schmidt - a physician - canceled the state health insurance policy he receives by virtue of his state office.

"I don't think it's fair that I get the taxpayers of Idaho to buy me health insurance, and we're not willing to look at that problem for our other citizens who don't have that benefit," Schmidt said. "To me, that's something we should be doing."

When it comes to ignoring the plight of low-income Idahoans, Republican legislative leaders seem beyond shame.

But give the Moscow physician points for trying.

JEERS ... to Idaho state Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood. Who cares if Idaho taxpayers get fleeced defending her patently unconstitutional scheme to force-feed the Holy Bible to Idaho's public school students?

Not Nuxoll.

Her bill calling for the Bible to be "expressly permitted" for use in Idaho classrooms as a "reference" book violates Idaho's strict constitutional wall between church and state. In part, it says: "No sectarian or religious tenants or doctrines shall ever be taught in the public schools. ... No books, papers, tracts or documents of a political, sectarian or denominational character shall be used or introduced in any schools established under the provisions of this article. ..."

Clear enough?

If Nuxoll's bill becomes law, Assistant Chief Deputy Attorney General Brian Kane predicts it will be overturned.

When that happens, there's a good chance Idaho taxpayers will be compelled to pay the lawyers' bills for the winning side.

The state is already about \$1.5 million poorer because state lawmakers ignored Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's earlier warnings and passed unconstitutional bills anyway.

Not to worry, says Nuxoll.

Republican lawyer - and Idaho Supreme Court hopeful - Christ Troupis says she's right.

But Troupis has the luxury of telling Nuxoll what she wants to hear. Wasden's office is stuck with the law.

CHEERS ... to state Rep. Paulette Jordan, D-Plummer. Wednesday, she spoke up against a resolution commending Hecla Mining Company's 125th anniversary.

"Hecla Mining Co. is an organization that has caused irreparable harm to Idaho's environment and many of its citizens, especially those living within our tribal communities," said Jordan, a member of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. "I don't believe we should be honoring a business that has been forced to pay more than \$300 million for poisoning the water supply and destroying the economy of the Silver Valley in the last five years alone."

You don't hear that kind of talk in the state Capitol - possibly because Hecla is a big company that writes campaign checks. Among the recipients of the company's munificence two years ago were Jordan's seatmate, state Rep. Caroline Nilsson Troy, R-Genesee, and former state Reps. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow, and Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston.

Not surprisingly, Jordan was outgunned. Hecla's resolution passed 62-7. - M.T.