

Intolerance finds itself outnumbered in Idaho

This editorial was published in the Times-News of Twin Falls.

An effort to pursue a ballot measure that would have called for closing of the College of Southern Idaho Refugee Center failed dismally this week when proponents obtained less than a quarter of the signatures needed to put the measure before voters.

The measure wasn't just squashed, it was obliterated. Overwhelmingly rejected, vanquished and snuffed, resoundingly. Proponents had months to collect the 3,842 signatures that would have put the measure on the spring ballot, and in the end they convinced just 894 people to sign the petition - in a county with nearly 80,000 residents.

And it wasn't because of a lack of effort. If you did any shopping on Blue Lakes Boulevard in the past few months, you probably saw folks standing outside businesses seeking signatures. They were at other community events, too, including the Twin Falls County GOP's Lincoln Day Dinner. They held a march and rally, which drew a lot of Confederate flag-waving folks from outside the area, including the militant 3 Percent of Idaho, but didn't gather much attention - or signatures.

We couldn't be more pleased and proud. To us, the measure's failure is an affirmation of the strength and character of our community. If it wasn't already crystal clear, it is now: Twin Falls is a welcoming place that supports and encourages new residents, and as a whole we believe the refugee resettlement program is worth keeping around, despite the rantings of a tiny minority.

The people have spoken.

Nevertheless, Rick Martin isn't getting the message.

Martin, the head of the Committee to End the CSI Refugee Center and the main organizer of the initiative effort, said in no uncertain terms he isn't giving up.

"I'll fight on this issue till hell freezes over, and then I'll fight on the ice, to end refugee resettlement at (CSI)," Martin said.

Martin sees the measure's failure as just one lost battle in a long war. His next plan of attack: to oust trustees from the college board in the next election. If he can put his puppets in control of CSI, he might just be able to close the refugee center.

Co-opting the college by any special-interest group would be a travesty, in this case made much worse because the special interest is so morally despicable. Martin and his ilk are stoking fears about terrorism, Islam and the milking of the welfare system. Their premise is built on the misguided concept of the disenfranchised white, Christian, blue-collar worker who believes his

job and very identity are put in jeopardy by refugees posing a threat to traditional southern Idaho values and culture.

The truth, of course, is that refugees are contributing positively to our economy because they find jobs and pay taxes. They make us a richer community, culturally. And they're not forcing their religious beliefs on long-term residents. Southern Idaho Christians aren't under attack in Twin Falls; if anything, it's the refugees set in Martin's sights.

As the failed measure shows, Twin Falls County residents are seeing through Martin's sham. But we must stay diligent and ensure his lackeys fail in their ploy to seize control of the CSI board.

We're confident he'll fail again, because we believe in this community.