

# Redoubt movement helps push North Idaho politics to extreme right

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In Idaho's northernmost legislative district, Republican Party politics has been pulled farther to the right in recent years with the rise of the tea party.

But now a new element is pushing the party farther still: the arrival of conservative Christian "preppers" fleeing more populated states, who see the region as a "redoubt" – a place to settle and defend themselves when the whole country goes bad.

The "American Redoubt" push, which targets Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and eastern Washington and Oregon for a "political migration" movement, was declared by survivalist author and blogger James Wesley Rawles in 2011. On his "survivalblog" website he writes, "I'm inviting people with the same outlook to move to the Redoubt States, to effect a demographic solidification. We're already a majority here. I'd just like to see an even stronger majority."

How many have moved to the area as part of the push is uncertain. Longtime Bonners Ferry businessman and former Mayor Darrell Kerby said he's only encountered about 30. But he notes that Boundary County, with its dramatic river and mountain scenery, has a population of just 11,000 – "and that includes cats and dogs."

With most locals too busy trying to make a living and raise their families to get involved in politics, Kerby said, "You can really look big."

Two years ago, two ultraconservative state legislators were elected from the district: Reps. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, and Sage Dixon, R-Ponderay. Now, longtime Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint – the state's longest-serving senator and the newly named co-chair of the Legislature's powerful joint budget committee – is being challenged hard from the right in the primary.

A blogger in the Palouse area, Alex Barron, who calls himself "The Bard of the American Redoubt," wrote a scathing indictment of Keough in December on his "Charles Carroll Society" website, which touts the slogan, "Liberty-minded traditionalist migrating to conservative redoubts."

Barron slammed Keough as a "liberal authoritarian progressive" and accused her of "gun grabbing" and wanting to "tax more so she can spend more on her socialists, pro-homosexual union allies working in governmental schools."

## Challenge comes from the right

Keough is a Republican who's known as fiscally conservative but pragmatic. She has made her mark as a supporter of schools and rural needs unique to her area, and she has been elected 10 times. In her day job, she is executive director of Associated Logging Contractors; she formerly worked for the Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce.

Among the first comments on the Carroll Society article was one from a "Jefferson Franklin," who wrote, "How the heck did she get elected in the Redoubt? Crazy! Thanks for the local North Idaho posting."

Barron urged, "We must get a patriot man or woman to run against this authoritarian progressive. We must support that person with money and time."

Not long after his piece, an anonymous "Retire Shawn Keough" website appeared, making similar accusations and suggesting that Keough is actually a Democrat masquerading as a Republican. Her primary opponent, Glenn Rohrer of Priest River, links prominently to the site from his campaign website.

Rohrer said he's not part of the American Redoubt movement; he's a retired plant manager and military officer who's lived in Priest River for nearly 23 years. "I'm a conservative constitutional Republican, and my opponent is not," he said.

Rohrer, who is making his first run for public office, said he "never even thought about it till recently." Asked why not, he said he was prompted by "the direction the country's going and what I have found out about how my opponent has been voting."

Rohrer said he has lots of issues, but there are two he's pushed the hardest: opposition to federal funds being part of Idaho's overall state spending – as it is in all 50 states, due to federal funds for things like highways, school lunches and Medicaid – and his opposition to a child support enforcement bill that prompted a special session of the Legislature in 2015. The governor called that session after a handful of House conservatives killed the bill in committee, threatening the state's entire child-support enforcement system by rejecting federal standards for dealing with cases that cross international borders. In the special session, the bill passed.

"It's a terrible law," Rohrer said at a recent candidate forum in Priest River. He questioned whether the measure – adopted by every state – could allow someone overseas who "knows a name and says they have a child" to victimize American servicemen with false claims. "They can use this against our military," he said.

Scott, the first-term state representative from the district, helped lead opposition to the bill, raising questions of international encroachment on state sovereignty.

### **Looking for 'defensible' property**

Scott, who arrived in the area from Ohio 18 years ago and became active in politics three years ago, said she's met "a ton" of new arrivals, "probably 50 or 60," seeking safety in the region. She

said they've come from California, Oklahoma, New York, North Carolina, Michigan – “all over.”

“They literally picked up their stuff and left,” she said. “A lot of them just felt drawn here – they literally just felt drawn here. God lays it on people’s hearts to do things.”

Kerby, a Republican and 65-year resident of Bonners Ferry, said he has noticed a new group in the past five years that’s “kind of a very right-wing active group – I don’t mean traditional conservatives. I mean more of the traditional John Birch Society, fear-mongering kind of concern that the worst that government can provide is just behind the rock.”

Four years ago, the new group took over the local GOP central committee, Kerby said. “The locals had a wake-up call. Two years ago, the central committee was taken back by the traditional Republicans.”

Local GOP central committees also have swung to the right in Bonner and Kootenai counties in recent years, pushing out more mainstream Republicans, and they have not swung back.

Don Bradway, who lives just north of Coeur d’Alene, arrived almost five years ago “from what I call the occupied zone, which is California.” He said he came seeking a safe place and “like-minded people.”

“I make no bones about the fact I’m a conservative Christian and I like being around other people who think the way I do,” he said. Bradway, who is retired, estimated he’s met easily 100 other new arrivals who followed the same path, including many from California. He’s active in local politics, as are many, and was elected to the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee.

“I know there are a goodly number of folks who are able to retire, or self-employed, or come up here and try to find a job,” he said. He said California is “swirling around the drain of liberty.”

Bradway is convinced that a looming disaster, whether it’s a major earthquake or a financial collapse, will turn America’s cities into “just a mass of chaos,” with rioting and anarchy. “I know people who’ve said, ‘I’m looking for something that’s defensible, if the teeming hordes come surging out of Spokane,’ ” Bradway said.

Rawles, on his survival blog, writes, “Designating some states as a Redoubt is nothing more than a logical defensive reaction to an approaching threat.”

Kerby, who’s in the real estate and insurance business, said he has had clients in recent years ask about property that’s “defensible.”

“There’s quite a few new folks in the area, and that’s great,” Keough said.

She said newcomers have been telling her she’s not conservative enough.

“They believe I want to grow government – that I’m a liberal. Maybe they don’t like me personally, either,” she said. “I believe I’m a Republican. ... I’m fiscally conservative. I believe less government is usually better, but I’m also a pragmatist, and I believe that there is a proper role of government – a system of common schools, safe roads, infrastructure like sewer, water and now Internet. There’s an expectation that things like that are done by our government.”

“I guess because I say ‘yes’ occasionally, that goes against their script,” she said.

Scott, in her first term, has firmly established herself as a member of a group of House conservatives who tend to vote no – even voting against routine appropriation bills that keep the state functioning.

### **Tea party faithful run as Democrats**

This year, two candidates are running for the Legislature in District 1 as Democrats who have taken conservative, tea party positions. They haven’t been endorsed by local Democrats, who didn’t get their own candidate filings submitted in time to challenge them. As a result, Stephen Howlett, a building contractor from Bonners Ferry, is running as a write-in against one of them, Bob Vickaryous. Howlett, who ran the successful local Democratic presidential caucus that saw big turnout for Bernie Sanders, said his opponent is “a known John Birch believer running as a Democrat.”

Howlett said Vickaryous and the other candidate, Steve Tanner, who is running as a Democrat against Keough, are “out of the ultra-right groups that are up here. ... It’s kind of convoluted.”

Keough’s accomplishments over her long legislative career range from major and long-sought road improvements in her district – from the Sandpoint Bypass to realigning a highway intersection in the far north where semitrucks have crashed onto an elementary school playground – to expanding state higher education programs to small communities like Sandpoint and Bonners Ferry.

This year, as co-chair of the joint budget committee, she was able to partner with Rep. Luke Malek, R-Coeur d’Alene, who had been pushing for a four-year computer science degree program through North Idaho College and the University of Idaho that students could earn without leaving Coeur d’Alene.

“It wasn’t in the governor’s budget, and it wasn’t on the table at all,” Keough said. “Being in the co-chair post, I was able to make sure it got done.”

Kerby said, “It would be an almost unheard-of, asinine act to throw out the single most powerful legislator that these communities have ever had in history, who is finally in a position to literally direct resources for the community’s greatest needs.”

District 1 has never had a joint budget committee co-chair before; all recent holders of the powerful post have been from Southern Idaho.

“Sen. Keough has been a staunch and really talented and knowledgeable representative for this area for 20 years,” Kerby said. “Her background and in-depth knowledge of the issues that are near and dear to Bonner and Boundary county citizens is second to none. ... It would take another person 20 years to gain that insight.”

Sage Dixon, the other first-term state representative from the region, arrived in the area 14 years ago; he said he came from “south of Boise,” then clarified that he meant the San Francisco Bay Area. “We weren’t happy there and wanted some land,” he said. “So we visited once and moved up the next year.”

Dixon, who like Scott is unopposed in Tuesday’s GOP primary, said he’s heard of real estate brokers reaching out to people who want to relocate to the American Redoubt. An online “Redoubt Realty” service offers to refer people to real estate agents in the state they’re eyeing. Another website, based in North Idaho, offers “News for the American Redoubt.”

Dixon said he has no problem with the idea, “if they want to move to a certain area because they think they’ll be more comfortable there.”

Scott said, “Some of it’s to come to a safer spot to raise their kids. There’s a lot of areas in the country (where) there’s a ton of crime. They felt safe. They felt that they were with like-minded people.”

She said, “I agree with them. It’s up to every individual, what they’re called and led to do. I tell them what it’s like out here.”

Rawles, in his writings, calls on those who migrate to become self-sufficient, to home-school their kids, and to bring plenty of guns. Kerby said that blends in with the culture of the area, where guns have long been ubiquitous and home-schooling is common, particularly among groups like the Mennonite community.

Debbie Kuhn, who owns the Blanchard Mercantile in the tiny township where Scott lives, is a friend of Scott’s who’s watched with interest as the once detached local resident got fired up about politics. Scott has now abandoned her work as an aquatic biologist, which originally brought her and her husband to the area, to devote full-time attention to her part-time legislative post.

Kuhn, who said people in Blanchard are just fine with their unpaved streets and rural lifestyle, has long been the local election precinct judge and used to urge an apathetic Scott to vote. Now, no urging is needed.

“She’s a little spitfire,” Kuhn said. “She’s stirred up some pots, that’s for sure.”