

Cheers and Jeers: Taking a stand

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CHEERS ... to Madison Winn of Lewiston. Where others might take the easy path of indifference, this 19-year-old has embraced empathy and activism.

To Winn, the deaths of black men at the hands of white police officers - most recently in Minnesota and Louisiana - is not somebody else's problem. It demands a response here as well.

On Facebook, she launched a Black Lives Matter Too page, promoting a rally set for 4:45 p.m. next Friday on the Interstate Bridge between Clarkston and Lewiston.

"All lives do matter, but black lives aren't equal to the rest in this country," she told the Tribune's Stacy Thacker. "All lives matter when black lives matter."

In response, Winn has endured some withering abuse - including threats of violence - from comments posted on the page.

So the next time your faith in the future begins to wane, take heart from this young woman's idealism - and the courage she has shown under duress.

JEERS ... to Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny. Here's how he responded to Winn in a Facebook post:

"Madison I applaud you for your efforts to organize and stand up for something that you believe in and feel is a noble cause. However, to place the community and its resources in jeopardy to express a political view sometimes it just isn't worth it. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves the question should I rather than can I. Yes the constitution allows for freedom of speech and that is our right as an American citizen. But when our rights jeopardize the safety and security of others is exercising those rights the right thing to do because you can? Whatever the decision is we will do our best to ensure that the demonstration is conducted in a responsible manner which does not restrict or impede the rights of anyone but with the limited amount of resources this valley has, we can not ensure the safety of anyone involved and keep in mind the resources we use at this event must be pulled from somewhere. This means less resources to respond and assist throughout the rest of this community. Law enforcement would be happy to meet with you and your fellow organizers to discuss alternatives to your plans which would benefit all concerned."

The chief reiterated some of those comments in an email to Cary Lindsey of the Palouse chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice.

Would Ankeny take such a patronizing approach toward a protest rally organized by someone older or even an authority figure such as a city councilor or a state legislator?

Would the chief worry about staffing and resource issues about a rally being staged by the Tea Party or the National Rifle Association?

Was this the right tone to take with Winn and other young people who are getting the wrong idea about police officers by what they see occurring across the country?

Whether you agree with Black Lives Matter or not, do you really want a police chief attempting to impose this degree of leverage over political speech?

JEERS ... to Idaho state Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard. She is accusing Twin Falls County officials of covering up lurid details involving the sexual abuse of a young girl.

If this sounds vaguely familiar, it's because conspiratorialists whipped up a frenzy about a group of knife-wielding Syrian refugees gang-raping a mentally disabled young girl while the parents high-fived the boys.

False, false and false. There was no rape. There was no knife. There were no Syrians. There were no parents egging them on.

What actually happened was bad enough - a 5-year-old was inappropriately touched by a young boy who was encouraged by two slightly older boys. The boys were from Sudan and Iraq, not Syria.

"This girl was victimized, first by the boys and next by opportunistic racists," the Twin Falls Times-News editorialized last month.

Scott doesn't repeat those lies. But in a letter to lawmakers and constituents, she does the next best thing: "Numerous voters from districts around the state have contacted me expressing concerns about the lack of attention and legal transparency being given to the horrific story of child sexual assault in Twin Falls."

Not so. Local officials - notably Prosecutor Grant Loebs - have maintained that all three boys have been charged. But it's a juvenile matter and those cases are sealed. There's no cover-up. There's no conspiracy.

But there is an agenda. Twin Falls has been embroiled in controversy for months over the operation of College of Southern Idaho Refugee Center.

All which begs the question: Why is Scott not more outraged about other child sexual abuse cases occurring in Idaho - and more likely than not in her own corner of the state?

CHEERS ... to U.S. District Judge Edward Lodge. It's been two years since Idaho severed its partnership with Corrections Corporation of America. But details of how the contractor understaffed the Idaho Correctional Center near Boise to maximize its profits - exposing inmates to so much violence the place won the moniker "Gladiator School" - have been less than complete.

The Board of Correction settled for a partial accounting into how CCA billed taxpayers for phantom workers. Idaho State Police Col. Ralph Powell never carried out the criminal investigation he was asked to undertake. U.S. Attorney Wendy Olson and the FBI could find no violation of federal law.

All of that is about to change. Last week, Lodge gave ICC inmates suing the prison contractor a trial date. Beginning on Dec. 13, they'll bring their allegations of understaffing and subsequent gang violence into a public courtroom. This may be Idahoans' last, best chance to get the whole story.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. Wednesday, they were among 18 Republicans who opposed Carla D. Hayden's nomination to head the Library of Congress.

Hayden, chief executive of Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, drew accolades from the American Library Association.

But the conservative Heritage Foundation tried to stop her.

It's one thing for conservatives to block President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominees. But obstructing his appointee as librarian of Congress?

What's next? The White House chef? - M.T.