

Here's what put Heather Scott in detention

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, is no martyr.

Long before she was stripped of her committee assignments Thursday - and with them virtually all of her influence - Scott had displayed a reckless disregard for the well-being of the people she supposedly represents.

Munching on beef jerky at her committee desk, Scott espoused an ideology so rigid she was willing to disrupt Idaho's child support enforcement authority and put 183,000 Idaho children at risk.

One month after Dylann Roof slaughtered nine black parishioners at Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, S.C., there was Scott proudly displaying the symbol of Roof's racism, the Confederate battle flag, at Priest River's annual Timber Days.

Scott traveled to Burns, Ore. - twice - and displayed her overt sympathy for a group of armed insurrectionists who had occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

Relying on fake news, she fanned the flames of discord in Twin Falls by accusing law enforcement officials of covering up salacious details about a case of child abuse involving juveniles.

And last fall, she turned a deaf ear to evidence that her supporters, some of them apparently armed, harassed the 90-year-old mother-in-law of her Democratic opponent - and then chased off a young Democratic field operative.

That's not what landed Scott in the equivalent of legislative detention.

Here's what did:

In her letter to House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, said Scott traveled to "various legislative districts outside of her own to castigate members of the caucus publicly without due cause or provocation."

How is that worse than Sen. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, who went so far as to raise and spend money toward the defeat of three Senate Republicans in the 2012 GOP primary? Nonini suffered no consequences.

Perry describes a disruptive - possibly unstable - personality. "Rep. Scott has displayed paranoid and aggressive behavior. ... Convinced she and others were being 'spied' upon by leadership, she has previously damaged the Capitol building looking for the 'bugs' she believed were installed in the ceiling."

Is that any less bizarre than the events surrounding former Sen. John McGee's drunken driving arrest on Father's Day, 2011? Extremely intoxicated, barefoot and talking about being "in the promised land" got McGee mentioned in a Jay Leno monologue. What it failed to do was strip McGee of his leadership post or committee assignments - until the following year when he was caught sexually harassing a female staffer.

Of course, the nub of the Scott affair is her reported response to Rep. Judy Boyle taking over the House Agriculture Committee. Scott supposedly said female legislators who "spread their legs" get ahead. That puts Scott in violation of House rules forbidding members from disparaging colleagues or the full Legislature.

But what about Scott's closest political ally at the moment, Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg?

Last summer, Nate sauntered into Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill's office and surreptitiously tape-recorded their conversation. At the time, Bedke told the Idaho Falls Post Register: "It's conduct unbecoming a member of the House of Representatives, and I believe that it is misconduct."

"Conduct unbecoming" is the very definition of an ethics violation. Yet Nate retained all three of his committee assignments, including a seat on Revenue and Taxation Committee.

What matters is not so much what Scott said - or did not say - about Boyle or any other female lawmaker trading sexual favors for advancement.

What matters is that Scott essentially accused Bedke, House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, and the rest of the House GOP leadership of accepting those favors.

Legislators can get away with a lot of shenanigans.

Insulting leadership, however, is not one of them.

Year after year, Idaho's lawmakers have refused to yield to an impartial, independent and transparent system of rooting out ethical breaches. They've clung to a system in which only lawmakers can blow the whistle on each other and most of what happens remains under wraps.

Idaho's politicians are policing themselves.

Why should the arbitrary results surprise you? - M.T.