

Cheers & Jeers: No difference

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. If Idaho's chief executive is so confused about what is - and what isn't - discrimination, then he's just as oblivious about human rights.

In discussing President Donald Trump's travel ban imposed on Muslim-majority nations last Friday with Idaho Public Television's Melissa Davlin, Otter allowed that the policy discriminated in favor of Christian refugees who would still be allowed entry into the U.S.

"It is (discrimination)," Otter said. "The reason I think he did was because they were being more persecuted than others."

Asked if Muslims also faced persecution, Otter said: "Probably. I don't know that, but I do know that the Christians are."

By Tuesday, Otter was walking that back when he told the Idaho Press Club: "I think it's not discrimination, I think it's preference. I'm OK with religious preference."

When you prefer one group based on a characteristic - race, gender or religion - you are disfavoring another. What do they call that?

That's right - discrimination.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. Just once, don't you wish Risch wasn't such a resolute bully?

Risch played a supporting role this week when Senate Republicans silenced Massachusetts Democrat Elizabeth Warren's debate against confirming Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions as Trump's attorney general.

Warren quoted a letter Coretta Scott King wrote in 1986 to block Session's appointment to the federal bench because he had used "the awesome power of his office to chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens in the district he now seeks to serve as a federal judge."

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that violated Senate Rule 19, which forbids senators from "directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another senator or to other senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a senator."

Along with Idaho Sen. Mike Crapo, Risch voted to sanction Warren.

According to The Hill newspaper, Risch also objected when Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., tried to enter King's letter into the Senate record.

Next, Risch defended the episode.

"When I'm sitting on the floor of the Senate, either here or in the state, when people had a violation of the rules that was obvious and flagrant, to me that's like scratching on a blackboard with your fingernails - it's hard to sit still," he told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

As Russell noted, Risch - while a state senator in the early 2000s - famously directed Idaho State Police to arrest student demonstrators who had disrupted a Senate floor session.

And last week, his chief of staff, former state Sen. John Sandy, locked the doors of Risch's downtown Boise office after a large group protesting Trump's policies showed up.

Sort of a pattern here, don't you think?

CHEERS ... to Kristi Sharpe, community coordinator for the Clarkston Empowering People and Impacting Choices coalition.

EPIC was among the most prominent opponents to Clarkston's marijuana retailers. But the 2015 city elections settled the issue. Now Sharpe has shown the good judgment to focus on her organization's core mission: keeping young people healthy and drug-free.

"As a coalition, our greatest concern is not whether or not we have pot shops on Main Street in Clarkston, but rather how well our kids are managing their stress and anxiety in life," Sharpe told the Tribune's Kerri Sandaine.

So she's reaching out to her erstwhile adversaries toward a mutual goal - the well-being of Clarkston's youth.

It can involve something as simple as familiarizing parents and schools with how legal marijuana products are packaged.

"EPIC understands the business owners do not want marijuana in the hands of youth, either, so we believe this could be a win-win," Sharpe said. "We all need to work together to create a more protective community for the well-being of our youth."

What's refreshing here is how Sharpe recognizes good will on both sides.

JEERS ... to Idaho State Rep. Scott Syme, R-Caldwell. When politicians think they know more about science than scientists and science teachers, they start airbrushing what your kids will learn in school.

On Thursday, Syme persuaded the House Education Committee to erase from a series of proposed public school science standards five paragraphs involving climate change.

Last year, Idaho lawmakers also rejected science standards on much the same grounds.

"What I'm looking for is to have the public say, 'Yeah, maybe we can see there was a one-sided presentation on the negative side and, hey, let's talk about this and both sides of the issue,' " Syme said.

Who's on the other side? Koch Industries? The American Legislative Exchange Council?

What's next? Bibles in the classroom?

JEERS ... to former Idaho Attorney General David Leroy. Let's hope he merely got carried away at last weekend's Lincoln Day Banquet in Idaho Falls.

Leroy is a first-rate scholar of Abraham Lincoln. He has spent more than a quarter-century researching America's 16th president - and has generously donated much of the Lincoln-related memorabilia he's acquired to the people of Idaho as well as to Lewiston's territorial Capitol replica.

So it's hard to believe he found similarities between Lincoln and Trump: Both "inherited a politically divisive nation," both got less than a majority of the popular vote and both faced Supreme Court vacancies, budget challenges and congressional gridlock.

OK. How about this comparison:

- Trump's inaugural speech: "Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. The American carnage stops right here and stops right now."

- Lincoln's second inaugural: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Similar? You be the judge. - M.T.

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