

The day Idaho's conscience took a holiday

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Those who bemoan President Trump's ban on refugees and immigrants from Muslim-majority nations would have you believe this is a break with American history.

Far from it.

Within the experience of Americans still living, World War II provoked the country into confining people of Japanese ancestry within internment camps - including one located in Minidoka County in southern Idaho and another along the Lochsa River in Idaho County - for no reason other than their nationality.

A decade later, people were hounded from their professions for their political beliefs, associations or on the mere suspicion that they'd been tainted by communism.

If the national creed - "All men are created equal" - is ever going to be more than merely aspirational, you need people to stand up.

People in authority.

People whose opinion you respect.

People who take the long view.

People of conscience.

In this case, that means people who are willing to challenge their own president and political party.

There are more of them than you might think. The Washington Post counts eight GOP senators and 16 Republican House members who have drawn a moral line in the sand.

Among them you'll find the impassioned plea of Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham on behalf of "those who have served as interpreters for our military and diplomats ... seeking refuge in a country they risked their lives to help ... refugees who have been shown through extensive vetting to pose no demonstrable threat to our nation and who have suffered unspeakable horrors, most of them women and children."

From Idaho's all-Republican congressional delegation, look for neither moral clarity nor eloquence.

Some have simply chosen to keep their heads down.

A member of the Intelligence and Foreign Relations committees, Sen. Jim Risch is privy to how Trump's travel ban plays right into ISIS propaganda and recruitment while undermining American troops abroad.

In fact, he's chairman of the germane subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Middle East and counterterrorism.

Yet he hides behind a spokeswoman, who said her boss is studying the issue and will have more to say later. Perhaps that will occur during his next appearance with Wolf Blitzer on CNN.

Then there's Sen. Mike Crapo.

On increasingly rare occasions, the state's senior elected official has taken risks with his otherwise sky-high popularity. But even with a new six-year term under his belt, this won't be one of those times.

Instead, Crapo says he will follow - rather than lead - constituents who told him "we must take steps to secure our borders and I agree."

Thought you could rely on Congressman Raul Labrador?

Here's a self-professed libertarian who has proven his mettle by voting against overly broad national security bills, supporting Sen. Rand Paul's presidential campaign and challenging former House Speaker John Boehner.

Even one of his fellow Freedom Caucus members, Michigan's Justin Amash, set an example by accusing Trump of overreaching and undermining the Constitution.

Instead, Labrador cheered the president's darkest impulses - and then heaped scorn upon the news media's depiction of the "order as a 'ban on Muslims' ... (which was) intentionally designed to mislead the public and to undermine the president's agenda."

Yes, Labrador made tepid complaints about Trump's errors in implementing this agenda. Here's betting the White House won't quibble too much about that.

How about Congressman Mike Simpson?

Yes, that Simpson.

The one who has no qualms about speaking his mind on personal privacy, fiscal sanity and environmental stewardship.

Simpson, who declared Trump unfit for the presidency and never backed off that assessment.

Simpson, who has frequently incurred the wrath of his party's ideological base.

Yet, here was the Idaho Republican trimming his sails. Sure, Trump stumbled in the way he executed the travel ban, but, declared Simpson, the president "is fulfilling his duty and promise to evaluate the screening process for those attempting to enter our country to ensure that these individuals are indeed safe and pose no threat to us."

At least one of them has to know that today's carefully crafted political acquiescence to this president eventually will haunt him- possibly sooner than he expects.

All they need to do is look back at former Idaho Gov. - and later federal judge - Chase Clark. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, Clark no doubt drew ovations when he endorsed rounding up Japanese-Americans. As political analyst Marc Johnson noted, Chase - an Idaho Democrat - even went so far as to say people of Japanese ancestry "act like rats," and deserved to be sent "back to Japan, then sink the island."

Today, nobody's cheering Clark. Whatever else he accomplished in life, his reputation is stained.

And years from now, ordinary Idahoans will lament what's transpiring in their own time. - M.T.