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In a recent interview on CNN, Idaho's Sen. Jim Risch said it isn't his role to point out lies, writes Jerry Sturgill.

A profile in un-courage



Jerry Sturgill

Guest columnist

In the rapid-fire news cycles now dominated by scandal, arrests, international intrigue and terrorism, you may have missed this: In late October, our own Sen. Jim Risch was interviewed by Wolf Blitzer on CNN.

In the interview, Mr. Risch said it was not his role to point out lies, by the president or anyone else. No time for that.

He came across as lacking courage when it comes to standing up to President Trump. As a member of the legislative branch in our constitutional system of "checks and balances," he expressly abandons the responsibility of being a check or a balance.

Here is the relevant portion of the interview:

Blitzer: But when he lies about something and you know it's a lie, shouldn't you speak up?

Risch: That's your job.

Blitzer: But that's your job. You're a United States senator. You're a co-equal branch of the United States government.

Risch: Wolf, if I went around criticizing a statement that was made by the president or any one of my fellow senators or any one of the congressmen up here or people in Idaho who hold public office and I stood up and talked every time they talked and said I don't like this, I don't like that, I'm criticizing — I'd be busy all day long.

Yes! He really said this! (See <http://tinyurl.com/RischCNN>)

He was responding to questions about the diametrically opposite, courageous behavior of his fellow Sens. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., and Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., dismissing them for being critical of the president's disassociation from truth and reality.

In fact, he referred to the exchanges between Corker, Flake and the president as "bickering."

Bickering? Bickering is when you disagree about where the toothpaste

tube should be squeezed or who should take out the garbage.

Mr. Risch's responses are so far off the mark, it is almost comical. Sens. Corker and Flake have stood on principle — like parents teaching their children to respect others, tell the truth and pay their bills. Truth and principle are not the subject of bickering, argument or even disagreement.

Senator Flake has been clear about his purpose. Read his book, "Conscience of a Conservative: A Rejection of Destructive Politics and a Return to Principle." The title itself describes what is at stake and why he is speaking out.

Surely Sen. Risch knows this, but instead he telegraphs fear for his political position in the invertebrate-filled Trump ecosystem, equivocation about his duties as a senator, a poor attitude for discernment and defense of truth, or all of the foregoing.

He doesn't have time for criticism or disagreement? That is what public service is all about — to distill good decisions from the exchange of facts and ideas, and, when necessary, to correct factual errors and misguided opinions based upon them. If he is not willing to engage energetically in this process, he should not be in Washington. He sounds like a political eunuch.

CNN commentator Chris Cillizza, in stunned response to the Blitzer-Risch interview, wrote this:

"The idea forwarded by Risch that he is simply too busy to possibly fact check the President of the United States is ... ridiculous. Imagine if, as a parent, you said something like: 'If I spent all of my time making sure my kid didn't cross the street in traffic or swallow some bleach, I'd get nothing done all day!' ...

"The whole damn point of public service is to serve the public. You do a disservice to the public when you abrogate your responsibility to tell the truth and ensure that those around you do the same. Case closed."

Yes, case closed.

Jerry Sturgill lives with his family in Boise. He seeks to promote rational, respectful dialogue and smart problem solving in business and politics.