

Cheers & Jeers: Labrador Inc.



Marty Trillhaase

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Now serving his sixth year in office, Labrador continues to unethically dip into his campaign contributions to supplement his household budget.

In her profile of the 1st District congressman Sunday, the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell noted Labrador still pays his wife, Becca, about \$2,000 a month to maintain his re-election campaign's books. It's a practice he began shortly after his first election in 2010.

That's on top of the \$174,000 Labrador draws from the taxpayers.

Labrador told Russell he relies on his wife because she's the "one I trust most in the world," and that he's "more than careful," after enduring an employee who stole money from his law practice.

A novice who is cobbling together a congressional campaign with the thinnest of resources might get away with that - but not someone who has acquired the time and the means to hire a professional staff.

When it looked into the practice in 2012, USA Today could find no more than 32 of the 535 House and Senate members who employed even distant relatives on their campaigns.

The year before, the watchdog group Public Citizen found only 20 members who employed spouses or siblings on their campaigns.

And the practice would have been banned outright had the Senate concurred in a 2007 reform passed by the House.

It's bad enough when politicians take large sums from special interests to buy campaign commercials. Money in politics buys access - and



breeds cynicism among ordinary voters.

But how much more influence do these contributions buy when the dollars are spent on groceries or making house payments?

For the first six months of the year, Labrador's campaign reported taking in \$341,000. During that same period, it paid Becca Labrador \$36,396 - including 13 checks issued in 2015.

In other words, that's more than 10 percent of every dollar Labrador's campaign accepted from the likes of Anheuser-Busch, Union Pacific, Koch Industries, Citizens United, the National Automobile Dealers Association, New York Life and Goldman Sachs.

"It's now a for-profit business that provides the livelihood of the whole family and that raises some grave conflict of interest concerns," said Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist for Public Citizen.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. Thanks to him, the final chapter of the Idaho Education Network fiasco will be written in a public courtroom and by an impartial judge - rather than in a private setting among elected officials and their cronies.

In a process the Idaho Supreme Court described as corrupt, former Idaho Department of Administration Director Mike Gwartney handed over the \$60 million IEN contract to a pair of Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's campaign contributors - Qwest (now CenturyLink) and Education Networks of America. That action, said the Supreme Court, voided the contract and obligated someone in state government to retrieve the almost \$30 million in tax dollars already allocated to the contractors.

The court directed Gwartney's successor, Administration Director Robert Geddes, to take that step. But last month, Geddes wiggled his way out of it.

That left the question on Wasden's desk. In an Aug. 10 demand letter, followed up with a formal lawsuit launched Aug. 23 in 4th District Court, Wasden formally demanded repayment.

CenturyLink and ENA have asked the federal courts to intervene, contending the state contracting laws violate their due process rights



under the U.S. Constitution.

It's only a first step. But Wasden has offered an Idaho public jaded by years of observing Otter and his cronies compound one error over another a reasonable chance this sordid affair will get resolved.

JEERS ... to University of Idaho campus veterinarian Peter Autenried. The more that details emerge about the UI's decision to trap and euthanize a group of feral cats and kittens, the more convoluted the picture gets.

As the Moscow-Pullman Daily News' Shanon Quinn reported this week, Autenried and the UI's communications office found themselves contradicted on a number of fronts.

For instance, the UI said it asked the Humane Society of the Palouse for assistance.

Not so, HSOP Executive Director Autumn St. Armand told the Daily News.

Next, the UI said it received authorization from the Idaho Fish and Game Department - as required by Moscow city code - to trap the cats.

But when Quinn asked Regional Conservation Officer Mark Carson about that, he said Fish and Game could not have complied because it does not deal with feral cats. Meanwhile, Moscow Police Chief James Fry said the UI didn't come to his agency for authorization,

Maybe there's less here than meets the eye. If the cats were indeed deathly ill, nothing would have saved them. But at best, the UI did not bother to fully explore its options. At worst, it failed to get its story straight.

CHEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. This week, he concluded a two-year journey, taking him to each of Idaho's 200 incorporated cities.



When was the last time a U.S. senator stopped by Onaway in northern Idaho?

Or Wind River in eastern Idaho?

Or Malta in southern Idaho?

These are the out-of-the-way places. Communities so small they're accustomed to being overlooked. Pressed for time, politicians tend to focus on where they can find the most people and media markets.

His campaign war chest filled to the brim and his own poll numbers in good shape, Crapo has the wind at his back.

He does not have to work this hard.

Were Crapo simply interested in taking the pulse, a tour of 50 large and small towns would have sufficed.

Moreover, as the Lewiston Tribune's William L. Spence reported Thursday, Crapo's constituents haven't been pulling their punches.

If Crapo has heard it once, now he's probably heard it 200 times: He's part of a corrupt political establishment.

But Crapo delivered a message of his own.

"I don't want to leave you with a rain cloud over your head," Crapo told his Onaway audience. "We still have the strongest economy in the world. We have the freest people and the best system of government, but we have to fight to keep it."

If nothing else, it's a welcomed respite from Donald Trump's apocalyptic "Make America Great Again" rhetoric. - M.T.

