

Bailing out

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Being part of the eight House members from both parties hammering out an immigration reform bill got Labrador a seat next to "Meet the Press" host David Gregory and "This Week's" George Stephanopoulos. Of course, Idaho Education News' Kevin Richert and the Associated Press' John Miller can't get their calls answered. But, hey, his time is limited.

Until Wednesday, when Labrador turned his back on the immigration reform negotiations just as his seven colleagues got some traction.

Labrador objected to giving newly legalized residents access to public health care.

Maybe that's a deal-breaker for Labrador, but not for the remaining Republican members of the panel - Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida, John Carter and Sam Johnson, both of Texas.

"We have found a way forward," Carter told The Hill newspaper.

And how is it that people who would acquire legal status are not subject to the laws of this country, including its health care system? Why would that matter so much to Labrador, who before his election in 2010, practiced immigration law?

Could it be the Tea Party favorite was looking for any excuse to bail on immigration reform?

It would not be the first time Labrador talked about cutting deals before beating a hasty retreat rather than alienate his base.

In 2011, Labrador found a reason to vote against raising the debt ceiling - after it was clear the measure would pass - because others, including Rep. Mike Simpson and Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, all R-Idaho, would take the heat for voting yes.

Much the same thing happened in January. Simpson, Crapo and Risch joined in supporting a must-pass bill to back away from the fiscal cliff. Labrador took the easy way out and voted no.

Say this for him, Labrador is doing a good job of looking out for himself.

CHEERS ... to former Lewiston City Library Director Dawn Wittman. Browse through the city's newly opened downtown library Saturday. See how it compares to the Tsceminicum branch on Thain:

- Space - the new building has 21,000 square feet on the first floor, plus another 15,000 square feet on its as-yet unfinished second floor. Tsceminicum had 7,000 square feet.

- Meeting space - Instead of a single upstairs conference room that doubled as a staff break room, the new building offers three settings of various sizes, as well as a separate center for teenagers.
- Technology - More computers, self-checkout counters and Internet access.

It's the difference between crowding a library into a convenience store and opening a modern facility.

Getting there meant overcoming frustrations and sidestepping roadblocks. After two bond issues failed, library supporters cobbled together a package of public and private dollars and, over a matter of years, put together their plan.

At the heart of it was Wittman. Whether it was raising public awareness, organizing fundraising efforts, writing grants, delivering a vision of what a new library should be or even working out the details with architects, Wittman was the common denominator.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. The fellow who admitted congressional gridlock makes for an easy day at the office hasn't been burning the candles at both ends.

At least, not when it comes to sponsoring new bills.

According to OpenSecrets.org, Risch sponsored three bills last year - two dealing with hydroelectric projects in southern Idaho and another addressing education programs in developing countries.

By comparison, Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, sponsored 29 bills. Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, sponsored 10 measures and Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, promoted seven bills.

Under normal circumstances, whether a lawmaker has drafted a lot of bills would not raise eyebrows. It's only one measure of effectiveness.

But Risch is the fellow who told the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey he reveled in not getting much done, in being part of the D.C. social set and in engaging in a bunch of overseas travel.

"You know, I really enjoy this job. I really like this job," Risch told Popkey.

CHEERS ... to former University of Idaho President Duane Nellis and Lewis-Clark State College President Anthony Fernandez. With Boise State University President Robert Kustra and Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas, they have endorsed the Idaho Core Standards.

These standards would increase academic vigor while infusing Idaho's testing regimen with a badly needed dose of critical thinking and communication skills.

"All you have to do is look at the statistics to know that the old set of state standards isn't working for our children," the presidents wrote in a joint statement. But you don't often witness

Idaho's college and university presidents displaying unity and leadership on an issue that will draw flak from the fringe.

Spurred on by right-wing talk show host Glenn Beck and others, critics have targeted this national program. They malign it as a plot to dumb down the schools.

With luck, this won't be the last time leaders of Idaho's institutions of higher learning enter the arena to advocate for education.

JEERS ... to Washington state legislators. In the midst of the Great Recession, they trimmed spending at the Public Disclosure Commission by 25 percent. Who benefits from that? Why, they do. Of course.

The understaffed PDC hasn't been checking over the reports lobbyists file. And, as the AP's Mike Baker reports, those reports shade the truth just enough to spare lawmakers from reporting who has been buying them expensive meals.

Rep. Jim Moeller, D-Vancouver, wants a new fee on lobbyists to boost the PDC budget and cover the cost of making this information more accessible to you.

Good for him. - M.T.