

# Oh contraire

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. When columnist Chris Carlson accused him of recruiting Bryan Smith to challenge fellow U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, in next spring's GOP primary, Labrador was filled with righteous indignation.

Not five days later, Labrador was giving nuanced responses to a Washington, D.C., news outlet on the same topic.

This speculation is not unfounded. Labrador and Simpson clashed earlier this year when Labrador joined an aborted coup against House Speaker John Boehner. Simpson said Labrador damaged his credibility. Labrador called Simpson a "bully."

Labrador is a darling of the right-wing Club for Growth. Smith entered the race and Club for Growth jumped in on his side, a move that could put \$1 million at the challenger's disposal.

Labrador has not endorsed Simpson - a highly unusual stance for seatmates.

So last month, Carlson - retired journalist and former Gov. Cecil Andrus' press secretary - wrote that Labrador was responsible for recruiting the Club for Growth to Smith's side.

Carlson got it wrong.

"I did not recruit Bryan Smith," Labrador wrote to Carlson. "The Club for Growth picked Mike Simpson as a top target without my knowledge, and picked Bryan Smith as a challenger without my help. In fact, even though Bryan Smith seems to be a fine person and a good candidate, I don't know him well enough to recruit him for a political position in Idaho."

Carlson retracted the column.

But then the congressman went into personal assault mode: "You are an embarrassment to the legacy of your mentor Cecil Andrus."

Five days later, Politico focused on the Simpson-Smith dust-up and again pressed Labrador about whether he had talked to Smith.

"People have asked me my opinion about a lot of things," Labrador said. "I'm not confirming or denying anything."

Labrador fails to see the contradiction. Carlson asked if he recruited Smith. He didn't. Politico only asked if he had talked to Smith.

Then why evade Politico's question and invite more speculation? Because, Labrador said, the reporter called him on his private cellphone and wouldn't take no for an answer. Later, he acknowledged talking to Smith "several times" but not until Smith had entered the race.

That's enough Clintonesque parsing to make your head spin. Is this congressman being disingenuous? Or is he not ready for prime time?

CHEERS ... to former Gem County Sheriff Mark John and his three companions who made the crucial discovery that led to last week's rescue of Hannah Anderson in the Idaho wilderness.

John, his wife Christa, as well as Mary and Mark Young, were horseback riding in the Morehead Lake area, 40 miles east of Cascade in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness when they encountered a man and a teenage girl.

Enough red flags went up - the couple lacked adequate gear and seemed confused about their intended destination of the Salmon River - that they made a mental note.

When they got home Aug. 8, the horseback riders recognized James Lee DiMaggio, the 40-year-old who had abducted 16-year-old Anderson after killing her mother and brother in California.

By calling the police, John helped focus the manhunt in the right location, which culminated in the FBI sending in rescue teams Saturday.

Credit John and his party for doing everything right - getting involved and remaining vigilant.

JEERS ... to Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. In the midst of the Omega Morgan megaload standoff last week, what did Idaho's chief executive do?

Call Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell to avoid a standoff? The U.S. District Court says the Forest Service has jurisdiction over megaload traffic in the 100-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 12 that winds through the Wild and River Scenic corridor. And Brazell wanted to hold off allowing megaloads through the area until he'd worked out a set of rules.

No.

Did Otter check in with the Nez Perce Tribe, which had a right to be consulted before megaloads entered the reservation?

No.

Did the governor contact his counterparts in Montana, where the Omega Morgan shipment headed en route to the Alberta tar sands?

Not as far as anyone knows.

No, Otter's idea of executive leadership is to pass the buck. When the Idaho Transportation Department gave Omega Morgan the green light to proceed, Otter didn't get involved.

Spokesman Jon Hanian said Otter believed ITD was "following protocol."

Would Otter be so passive if the bureaucracy "following protocol" was the Environmental Protection Agency?

JEERS ... to state school Superintendent Tom Luna. How did Luna's cronies at Education Networks of America wind up with a WiFi wiring contract potentially worth \$33 million during the next 15 years when four other companies - notably Twin Falls-based Tek-Hut - underbid it?

ENA contributed \$6,000 to Luna's campaign. Garry Lough, Idaho director of customer services for ENA, once worked at Luna's shop.

Idaho Education News' Kevin Richert secured the scoring documents and noted a pattern. The system rated bidders for cost, technology and experience.

But Richert found that being high or low on price didn't matter as much as having experience and technology assets. Tek-Hut's bid was nearly 22 percent below ENA's - but it scored only 1.3 percent better on price.

Meanwhile, ENA's advantages in experience and technology got magnified.

"Bidders that scored low for experience and technology paid a very high price in terms of their overall score," Richert reported. "And ENA's top scores in both categories wound up carrying considerable weight."

What a coincidence. - M.T.