

# Labrador finds his insurgent past dogging him

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

During the weekend, the story about an alleged ethics violation became less about the accused - Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash. - and more about her accuser.

That would be Todd Winer, who according to sources cited by the Spokesman-Review filed a complaint with the Office of Congressional Ethics. The OCE has forwarded the file on to the House Ethics Committee, which may hold hearings.

Winer used to be McMorris Rodgers' press secretary.

But that isn't the juiciest part.

After departing the Washington Republican's office, he took up a similar post with Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. In fact, he'd been working for Labrador for about a month when OCE got the complaint.

Capitol Hill reporters found the element of a disgruntled former employee far more intriguing than the mundane charges that McMorris Rodgers relied on her campaign aides to wage a successful bid for chairwoman of the House Republican Conference in 2012. Even if it's true, she's hardly guilty of breaching the public's confidence. It's the kind of technical transgression congressional scholar Norm Ornstein says is likely to get McMorris Rodgers a slap on the wrist, if anything.

Hence, a seemingly minor detail in last week's wire accounts of the affair gradually moved up toward the opening paragraphs - before landing on the National Journal's headline.

"One source sympathetic to McMorris Rodgers, who did not want to be identified, said Winer was unhappy about not getting the job as the House Republican Conference communications director," reported the Journal's Billy House. "The source claimed that he is known to have started shopping his allegations around to reporters and others last year."

Members of Congress get subjected to ethics complaints routinely. But having one linked to a House staff member, especially when it's within the same political party and against a member who represents a neighboring district, is virtually unheard of.

Plus, it invites the inevitable questions: Did Winer go to his boss before he proceeded? What did Labrador know and when did he know it?

"The first time I heard about the OCE investigation was Thursday, when the news broke in the media," Labrador said in a prepared statement. "I had no prior knowledge of the investigation. Because of its sensitive nature, I will not make any additional comments about the matter."

Here's Labrador's problem: He's engaged in this kind of open warfare with fellow Republicans before.

As a state legislator, he helped oust Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's hand-picked GOP chairman, Kirk Sullivan, and then sabotaged Otter's 2009 signature issue, highway funding.

A year ago, he was a ringleader in the abortive coup against House Speaker John Boehner.

When fellow Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson called him out, Labrador blasted Simpson as a "bully" and "an old-school legislator that went to Washington, D.C., to compromise. ... That's how you get to a \$1 trillion deficit, by just tinkering around the edges."

Labrador is tied to the Club for Growth, which recruited Simpson's GOP primary opponent, Idaho Falls attorney Bryan Smith. How much help Labrador has provided Smith is a matter of dispute, but he has refused to endorse his seat mate.

Many of his fellow Republicans also kept score of Labrador flirting with a challenge to Otter - who as a former Idaho congressman still has friends on the Hill.

Unfortunately for Labrador - and the constituents who rely upon his influence with other members of the House - this ethics probe against a fellow Republican fits a pattern.

Maybe this time, Labrador had nothing to do with it.

There's always a first time. - M.T.