

Labrador chastised Bundy before it was easy

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Literally over night, Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy went from being the political right's lion to its louse.

Wednesday, the New York Times nailed Bundy with his own words:

"I want to tell you one more thing I know about the Negro," he said. Mr. Bundy recalled driving past a public-housing project in North Las Vegas, "and in front of that government house the door was usually open and the older people and the kids - and there is always at least a half a dozen people sitting on the porch - they didn't have nothing to do. They didn't have nothing for their kids to do. They didn't have nothing for their young girls to do.

"And because they were basically on government subsidy, so now what do they do?" he asked. "They abort their young children, they put their young men in jail, because they never learned how to pick cotton. And I've often wondered, are they better off as slaves, picking cotton and having a family life and doing things, or are they better off under government subsidy? They didn't get no more freedom. They got less freedom."

Instantly, people who had defended Bundy's dispute with the Bureau of Land Management were running for cover. Fox News Sean Hannity and others were drawn to the image of Bundy standing up to a government that was confiscating his cattle, a provocation that Bundy's supporters seemed prepared to match with violence. Fortunately, what was beginning to look eerily like another Ruby Ridge or Waco ended when the BLM walked away.

Now they were stuck with a garden variety bigot.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., called the remarks "offensive and I wholeheartedly disagree with him."

Sen. Dan Heller, R-Nev., agreed. His office labeled Bundy's statement "appalling and racist," and condemned "them in the most strenuous way."

But Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador didn't have to.

Speaking to Ada County Republicans April 22 - one day before Bundy imploded - Labrador labeled the rancher for what he was.

A deadbeat.

A lawbreaker.

Someone who had been cheating the American taxpayer out of \$1 million in grazing fees since 1993.

As the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey reported, Labrador said: "One of the concerns I have in the Bundy case is that you have a person who appears to have been violating the law.

"Because the federal courts, again and again, have told this gentleman that he owes money in federal grazing rights, in federal grazing permits," Labrador continued. "Now he claims that he doesn't owe that money, but the courts have disagreed with him."

Labrador made the compelling argument that the government's confrontation with Bundy was unnecessary. Simply by attaching a tax lien on Bundy's property, the government could have dried up his line of credit.

He also rallied to his argument the memory of the late Idaho Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth-Hage and her husband, Nevada rancher Wayne Hage, who is also deceased.

You can't find a couple who had fought more passionately against what they considered an obtrusive federal public lands management bureaucracy.

But they did so within the law. Hage even continued to pay his fees, Labrador said.

Other than Chenoweth-Hage herself, no one besides Labrador could have brought such credibility within the Idaho Tea Party and anti-federal government community.

That gave Labrador latitude to inflame or defuse the situation.

Displaying a sophisticated command of history and the facts, Labrador was a calming influence. The Idaho Republican took the right side of the Bundy brouhaha for the right reason - and at the right time. - M.T.