

Labrador's gain is Idaho's loss

Melissa Davlin/Idaho Reports

By poaching veteran political reporter Dan Popkey from the Idaho Statesman to become his new press secretary, U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, just eased a lot of stress for Idaho's congressional delegation.

Take a look at all the stories written about Idaho's delegation from July 1-29, when the Statesman announced Popkey's resignation. Of the 30 articles and blog posts I counted that originated from Idaho media - excluding editorials - nearly half originated from Popkey himself (including, notably, articles about Labrador from the week before Popkey quit to join his team).

Some of those were minor blog posts with press releases or campaign finance updates,

But Popkey did the most original reporting with quotes from politicians about Idaho's congressmen.

That's not to say Idaho's political journalists are slacking, but other reporters - including us at "Idaho Reports" - focus largely on state and local politics.

Popkey's move comes on the heels of other Gem State journo losses, like John Miller and Todd Dvorak, both of the Associated Press. Combined, their decades of institutional knowledge won't soon be replaced in the Capitol Correspondents Association.

Betsy Russell of the Spokesman-Review and Bill Spence of the Lewiston Tribune have expertly covered the Legislative beat for years, and Kevin Richert and Clark Corbin of Idaho Education News are pros.

But most of us have been on the Statehouse beat for five years or less, and turnover at papers in Twin Falls, Nampa and Idaho Falls is noticeable.

Popkey was a dynamic personality in Idaho journalism, too. He butted heads with politicians at press conferences and in interviews and was fearless when he challenged politicians. And he broke career-altering stories, including his reporting on Sen. Larry Craig's arrest and guilty plea for soliciting sex in a Minneapolis airport bathroom as well as his investigation into the two times state Rep. Mark Patterson, R-Boise, had been charged with sexual assault.

But Popkey had a talent for avoiding burning bridges, and sources still trusted him enough to toss him major scoops. (By the way, Popkey, if you're reading this, can I have your Rolodex?)

He was a reporter I've always looked up to, and I'm going to miss him in the statehouse press room.

Without Popkey, there's a gaping hole in Idaho political journalism.

Brilliant move, Congressman Labrador.

Now it's time for the rest of us to step up.

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