

Growing up

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CcHEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Beginning his fifth year in office, the Tea Party darling put his constituents first and voted to re-elect House Speaker John Boehner.

That's in stark contrast to Labrador's behavior two years ago when he led a dozen fringe Republicans against keeping Boehner in charge.

His seatmate, Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, argued Labrador had sacrificed credibility - and damaged his ability to represent his constituents - by alienating the most powerful figure in the House.

Opposing Boehner again this week would have moved Labrador from the back bench to the broom closet - and taken his more than 650,000 Idaho constituents with him.

"The votes were simply not there to defeat the speaker," Labrador said. "I think it is unwise to marginalize yourself when there is no chance of victory, which was the case today."

That's a remarkable turnaround for a politician who prizes above all else his credentials with a crowd that sees a vote for Boehner as indistinguishable from putting Nancy Pelosi back in charge. According to the National Journal, Labrador said he's been threatened with a GOP primary challenger, more than 4,000 people have posted comments on his Facebook page and conservative talk-radio host Mark Levin has put a bull's-eye on his back.

The GOP leadership may yet take umbrage at some of Labrador's comments such as "my vote for Mr. Boehner is not an endorsement of his past leadership." Just the same, the congressman who played ball this year has learned from his mistake.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. By one account, Otter has lavished \$100,000 on private attorneys- first Monte Neil Stewart and now Gene Schaerr - arguing the federal courts should reinstate Idaho's same-sex marriage ban on the dubious theory that allowing gays to marry is bad for kids.

"Removing that definition and replacing it with 'any two qualified persons' definition will inevitably weaken those child-centric norms," Schaerr wrote in a brief headed to the U.S. Supreme Court. "As a result, more children of heterosexual couples will likely grow up without the active influence of one or both biological parents, and will therefore face an increased risk of crime, emotional and psychological difficulties, poor performance in school and other ills."

Attorney General Lawrence Wasden has avoided that stance, arguing merely that the 6th U.S Circuit Court of Appeals was correct when it recognized a state's right to define marriage.

Agree or not, it's a legal argument as opposed to Otter's political rant. Can you imagine the Supreme Court deciding this weighty issue on the basis of social engineering, hypotheticals and opinions about what is and is not a functioning family?

CHEERS ... to Idaho Correction Director Kevin Kempf. He inherited a truly awful concept - bringing back the firing squad.

Because pharmaceutical companies are choking off the supply of chemicals used for lethal injection, the agency was exploring this idea.

A Department of Correction spokesman told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell they dropped a proposed bill because setting up firing squads would be expensive - at least \$300,000 - and the issue would have distracted lawmakers' attention from other priorities.

Only three firing squad executions - all in Utah - have been carried out since the death penalty was reinstated in the 1970s. Lining up someone against the wall and having a half-dozen marksmen shoot him dead is fraught with the potential for error - to say nothing of the media spectacle it would attract. It also would cause delays while the courts ruminate on whether death by firing squad violates the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

JEERS ... to former Idaho Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. If former Otter Chief of Staff Jason Kriezenbeck's new gig as Corrections Corporation of America lobbyist and former state Department of Education staffer Gary Lough's transformation into Education Networks of America's Idaho customer service director are fair game for scrutiny, then so is Ysursa's move through the revolving door.

Literally hours after his term ended, Gallatin Public Affairs announced Monday Ysursa had joined the firm where he holds the title "of counsel."

What makes that relevant is Ysursa's former role as an Idaho Land Board member. Among Gallatin's clients are mining, forest products and engineering firms, as well as the University of Idaho.

Idaho has no cooling-off period prohibiting former government officials from lobbying for a year or two - although Ysursa has no plans to do so. Gallatin first approached him after Ysursa announced his plans to retire a year ago, but nothing more was said until last month. Still, you're the last to know.

While by no means the most egregious case, it remains another example of Idaho's cozy political-corporate culture.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, and Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee Chairman Jeff Siddoway, R-Terretton.

Together, they closed the door to Otter's call to cut taxes on big corporations and wealthy individuals by as much as \$200 million.

Siddoway told a disappointed Idaho Freedom Foundation Executive Director Wayne Hoffman no tax cuts would get past him until school budgets are replenished.

"My push is to get that funded to where we can get good teachers and retain good teachers," Siddoway said.

For his part, Hill wrote he wants to get education and transportation "back on their feet."

CHEERS ... to Latah County Clerk Susan Petersen and Lewis County Clerk Cathy Larson. Both retire from office Monday.

Petersen was first elected in 1990; Larson first won office in 1986.

Clerks are the courthouse sparkplugs. They manage the budgets, staff the courts, administer elections and serve as custodians of the public records. Often it's up to them to deliver the bad news: No, you can't vote in this jurisdiction. You can't avoid jury duty. No, there's no money in the budget for that.

Few have held this job as long. Nobody did it better. - M.T.