

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Continuing Surprises. . . Missed Opportunities

Chris Carlson/Carlson Chronicle

President-elect Donald Trump and his transition team continue to dish out surprises. The latest example is the bait and switch they pulled on Fifth District Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, 47, from Spokane. Leaks from the transition team to the media, in this case no less than the *Wall Street Journal*, led media to believe she was Trump's choice to be the 52nd Secretary of the Interior.

She may have been the president-elect's preference, but she wasn't the choice of eldest son, Donald Junior. Both Junior and Eric Trump love to hunt, and Junior made it abundantly clear last October at a fund-raiser for his father in a hangar at the Boise Airport that the Trump family opposed selling off any federal land to states or private entities.

In an interview with the *Spokesman-Review's* intrepid Boise reporter, Betsy Russell, Donald Junior mentioned that while working in Nevada he enjoyed hunting and the access to good hunting. He readily conceded the family might be out of tep with Republican orthodoxy, but he firmly believed turning over federal land to the states would ultimately lead to public sale of those lands.

We may never know whether in her interview on Monday at the Trump Tower the congresswoman stuck to her position that some lands ought to be sold by the Feds to states because in part the need for a greater supply of timber for cutting, or she indicated she could tailor her view to conform with Junior's bias.

If she stuck to her guns on principal that may have done her in or if she indicated she could adapt that may have come across as expediency and that could have done her candidacy a fatal blow also. The guess is she stuck to principal.

It is a safe bet that the freshman congressman from Montana, Rep. Ryan Zinke, hammered home his opposition to the sale of any federal lands to

the states. This also cinched support for Zinke from many of the nation's hunting groups.

Whatever the reason, it was unconscionable the manner in which the transition team floated her name as a trial balloon then took note on how many of their base interest groups took potshots.

It is also a shame because Cathy McMorris-Rodgers is a pragmatic conservative and not an ideologue. The Department of the Interior over the years has worked much better with the former and done much to thwart the latter. It's the difference between former Idaho Governor and Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus, who was wildly successful, and James Watt, who was an enormous failure.

She is the true conservative, one who knows it is the root word of conservation, which means resource conversion, whether it is wheat into bread, timber into 2 x 4's, or minerals into metals is done sustainably.

The League of Conservation Voters, prematurely opposed her nomination. That was a mistake. She is the highest ranking Republican woman in the Congress, and she didn't get there by accident.

She would have listened to the LCV and other environmental groups' views and while not necessarily endorsing them all, would have incorporated what she could where she could. With Zinke it will be all adversarial. The "take no prisoners" attitude on the part of the ex-Navy SEAL will be problematic.

The congresswoman also would have brought a far more extensive background in dealing with Interior-related issues to the post. Based on "time in grade" and experience alone she is far more qualified than Zinke.

She represents a sprawling district highly dependent on sustainable resource conversion. Vaagen Brothers Timber is a major employer, so she follows closely timber supply issues and served with distinction on a bi-partisan legislative task force that worked diligently on possible solutions to the supply challenges..

She is conversant with Native American issues because the district has four tribes with reservations and she has worked well with all of them..

Though Interior's Bureau of Reclamation operates the Grand Coulee Dam, the National Park Service runs the National Recreation Area behind the dam. Her office frequently has dealt with Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the Endangered Species office.

She is probably one of the few people who knows that the dollars which flow into the Land and Water Conservation Fund to be used by Uncle Sam to purchase significant sites threatened by development come from the royalties Uncle Sam receives for off-shore oil and gas leases.

McMorris also understands the critical role Interior plays in Alaska. It's a safe bet she and Senator Lisa Murkowski would have become good friends.

Yes, McMorris is a devout Christian, but she doesn't wear it on her sleeve. She walks the talk and lets her actions speak. *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan once wrote a book on President Reagan, entitled "When Character was King"

If Donald Trump had selected Cathy McMorris-Rodgers to be his Interior Secretary, when her tenure was over people would know that character also has a queen.