

Kingsley needs a bigger sandbox to play in

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Freshman Reps. Mike Kingsley, R-Lewiston, and Bryan Zollinger, R-Idaho Falls, have 80 days of legislative service under their belts.

Enough time, they say, to conclude the Idaho House needs yet another ultra-conservative faction within the GOP caucus.

"We feel like the conservative message isn't getting out," Kingsley told the Tribune's William L. Spence.

Hey, what could go wrong?

Possibly the brand.

They're calling themselves the Idaho Freedom Caucus - essentially taking their template from Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, and about three dozen Tea Party acolytes who have tied the U.S. House Republican conference in knots for years.

Of course, Labrador's faction is better at dynamiting GOP leadership's aspirations than getting anything passed.

Credit the Freedom Caucus with deposing former House Speaker John Boehner, shutting down the government and, just last week, resuscitating Obamacare by derailing President Trump's plans to repeal and replace it.

How about the organizing premise?

That would be the Idaho Republican Party's platform. As Zollinger told the Post Register's Bryan Clark: "If you're adhering to this platform, you belong to this group."

So that puts the Idaho Freedom Caucus in favor of repealing the 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution - which would mean lawmakers, not voters, get to choose Idaho's U.S. senators. It also backs throwing the U.S. economy into chaos by disbanding the Federal Reserve and returning to the gold standard.

Where's the niche?

The Idaho House already has its band of renegade insurrectionists, led by Reps. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, and Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird. They've made life miserable for establishment types, notably House Speaker Scott Bedke,

R-Oakley.

Why not play in their sandbox?

Nothing doing. Nate, Scott and Giddings have made too many adversaries. It's time for a kinder, gentler version.

"Some walls have been built, some barriers," Kingsley said. "We need to come together as a group to get our message into meaningful bills."

But you have to wonder if Kingsley and Zollinger have forgotten basic arithmetic.

Get out the calculators.

Labrador's group has clout because it holds the balance of power between the 237-member Republican conference and the 193 Democrats. In other words, if the three dozen House Freedom Caucus members side with the Democrats, the House Republicans lose.

But in Boise, Democrats hold only 11 House seats compared to 59 Republicans. In other words, Kingsley and Zollinger need at least 25 Republicans on their side to get anywhere.

With one huge assumption: The 11 House Democrats don't discover how such a scenario puts them in the driver's seat. On an issue-by-issue basis, they can decide which wing of the GOP - leadership or the Freedom Caucus - will carry the day.

So the point of another conservative caucus is to empower Boise's North End liberals?

Finally, you have to wonder if these two have overdosed on marble dust. They seem to have forgotten they represent moderate legislative districts.

Zollinger comes from the central Idaho Falls area, where he eked out a 340-vote win out of 2,744 votes cast in last spring's GOP primary.

Kingsley got to Boise by ousting Democrat John Rusche in what has been a swing district.

Obviously, Kingsley and Zollinger have concluded the Idaho House is not sufficiently conservative. Are they saying their own constituents suffer from the same malady? - M.T