

# Trump's chump

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## **Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. Let's not wait. Let's just go ahead and issue Idaho's junior senator the 2017 Charles W. Sandman Memorial Award.

Designed as a set of blinders, this award honors the memory of the New Jersey congressman who during the Watergate summer of 1974 used his perch on the House Judiciary Committee to defend President Richard Nixon against impeachment virtually until the minute Nixon packed his bags and walked out of the White House.

A member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Risch followed in Sandman's footsteps Thursday. Rather than delving into why President Donald Trump fired FBI Director James Comey, Risch engaged in semantics.

His focus: Comey's explosive assertion that before Trump fired him, the president drew him into a private Oval Office conversation about dropping the investigation of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn's contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak: "I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go."

Risch reminded the nation of his credentials as a former Ada County prosecutor, boasted about his legal expertise and began parsing words:

"He did not direct you to let it go? ... He did not order you to let it go? ... Do you know of any case where a person has been charged for obstruction of justice, or for that matter any other criminal offense, where they said or thought they hoped for an outcome? ... You don't know of anyone that's ever been charged for hoping something. Is that a fair statement?"

End of story.

President exonerated.

Let's move on, shall we?

Except for a few pesky details.

Such as Trump holding Comey's job over his head.

Or the president ordering any potential witnesses - including Vice President Mike Pence and Attorney General Jeff Sessions - out of the Oval Office before he privately expressed this "hope" to Comey.

Or that a few weeks after Comey refused, he was unceremoniously dumped by a president who later told the nation he acted because of frustration with the "Russia thing."

Unfortunately for Risch, he wound up matching legal wits with Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., a former state attorney general, who rebutted: "In my experience as a prosecutor, when a robber holds a gun to your head and 'hopes' for your wallet, 'hope' is not the operative word."

Trump, of course, doesn't need another defense attorney.

But Idaho has only two senators. Idahoans don't care one iota about how useful Risch can make himself to Trump - or how clever he can be.

They would like to know, however, what motivated Trump to "hope" Comey would terminate the Flynn probe.

And it would not hurt if Risch showed a little more curiosity about why the president of the United States is fixated on Flynn or more interested in lifting the "cloud" from his administration than in defending the integrity of American elections against Russian hacking.

So enjoy your Sandman shades, senator.

You've earned them.

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Nobody - except for a few partisans such as Idaho House Democratic Leader Mat Erpelding of Boise - thinks Labrador ought to give up his \$174,000-a-year day job to run for governor.

But that doesn't give Labrador the right to subsidize his gubernatorial ambitions with the resources taxpayers provide to his congressional office.

Technically, he hasn't crossed that line.

But he's clearly inching toward it.

Exhibit A: Labrador's June 2 Memorial Day constituent message, replete with his picture and the seal of the U. S. House of Representatives.

After nominally honoring the contributions of America's veterans, the 1st District congressman's letter reminds the reader how "my staff" or "my office" or "our help" rescued not only veterans from the snarls of the federal bureaucracy, but also a northern Idaho couple in their dispute with the IRS.

Some of it almost reads like a script from a campaign commercial.

You'd never know that in April 2014, Labrador was the only member of the U.S. House - Republican or Democrat - to vote against adding \$1.5 billion in veterans services to reduce what his seatmate, Congressman Mike Simpson, called an "unacceptable backlog of disability claims."

Exhibit B: In Sunday's Idaho Falls Post Register, columnists Carrie and Jerry Scheid note an interesting modification in Labrador's congressional website:

"Have you ever tried emailing him on his website?" Carrie Scheid asked. "If you didn't live in his district, you'd get a message saying he wouldn't accept your comments because he doesn't represent you.

"Now that he's running for governor, that's been changed, of course."

CHEERS ... to Whitman County Superior Court Judge Gary Libey. As Katie Short of the Moscow-Pullman Daily News reported Saturday, Libey is seeking to lower the temperature in divorce cases.

Even before he took the bench, Libey had suggested his predecessor, Superior Court Judge Dave Frazier, adopt mandatory mediation in divorces.

Libey was drawing on the experience of the Asotin County courts, where mediation also is required in divorces.

Frazier implemented the policy on Jan. 1 - eight days before Libey took office.

Six months later, the results are in: Libey has not presided over a single divorce trial. They've all been resolved, if not amicably, then without the lawyers one-upping each other in a public courtroom. Good for him.

JEERS ... to American Lands Council President Jennifer Fielder of Thompson Falls, Mont. She's singing the blues about how rural communities, such as Idaho and Clearwater counties, are struggling with the loss of federal Secure Rural School dollars.

"Teachers are being laid off, schools are operating on four-day weeks and school budgets for libraries, music and arts are being eliminated," Fielder writes.

All true. But hearing it from Fielder is a bit like watching the kid who murdered his parents throw himself on the mercy of the courts because he's an orphan.

Until now, the ALC land transfer movement has disparaged programs such as SRS and Payment In Lieu of Taxes for lulling rural communities into dependence upon the federal government.

But if it helps make the case for their dubious idea of transferring federal lands to the states, ALC is not above shifting tactics.

Talk about chutzpah. - M.T.