

Keeping mum

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Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston

JEERS ... to U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador and Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo, all R-Idaho. Given the opportunity to repudiate Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann's assault on a loyal American diplomat, these three took a pass.

In a letter to the Inspector General, Bachmann asserted Huma Abedin, a veteran aide to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "has three family members - her late father, her mother and her brother - connected to Muslim Brotherhood operatives and/or organizations. Her position affords her routine access to the secretary and to policy-making."

Abedin, 37, is a native-born American and the wife of former New York Congressman Anthony Weiner.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., condemned Bachmann - and the four House members who signed her letter - as "nothing less than an unwarranted and unfounded attack on an honorable woman, a dedicated American and a loyal public servant."

But when the Idaho Statesman's editorial board asked Labrador about it, he said: "I think we would be foolish to think that people are not trying to infiltrate our government. ... I would hope she's smart enough to have enough evidence to make a statement like that."

Crapo and Risch had even less to say.

If they won't consider their prestige, perhaps they will think of ours.

Idaho's good name already bears the stain of Sen. Herman Welker, who was so supportive of Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy's red-baiting tactics of the 1950s that he was dubbed "Little Joe from Idaho."

And then there's Idaho's ill-deserved reputation for intolerance - fueled not only by renegades such as the Aryan Nations but also this idiotic comment from then-Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth-Hage, R-Idaho: "The warm-climate community just hasn't found the colder climate that attractive. ... It's an area of America that has simply never attracted the Afro-American or the Hispanic."

CHEERS ... to Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho. Asked about Bachmann's tirade, Simpson didn't merely respond. He pounced: "I thought it was outrageous."

Speaking to the Idaho Statesman, he labeled Bachmann's smear tactics a throwback to McCarthyism.

"We don't need to go back to those days," Simpson said. "I thought we'd learned our lesson when McCarthy finally went down."

And Simpson kept at it.

"The public says, 'There go those Republicans again,' " the Idaho Republican said. "It's a bad reflection on all Republicans. I can't believe the other four members she got to sign the letter with her. Amazing." Good for Simpson.

JEERS ... to Clarkston's city councilors. To hear them tell it, the city of Clarkston is an isolated island, unaffected by and totally separated from the larger community.

Hence it can walk away from the financially faltering Asotin County Family Aquatic Center.

It can rebuff the Lewis Clark Valley Chamber of Commerce's attempts to orchestrate negotiations between the council and Asotin County commissioners.

And when the commissioners suggest meeting with a mediator on neutral ground, councilors disparage the idea.

City Councilor Larry Baumberger goes one step beyond. To him, there's nothing to talk about: "At this point in time, I still maintain the facility is county owned, maintained and operated. The county elected officials need to address the situation, not the city officials."

He's forgetting the fact that two-thirds of Clarkston voters supported building the aquatic center in the first place.

That city residents are paying \$845,000 a year in extra sales taxes meant for the aquatic center - which the city has diverted for such things as a redundant ambulance service and new offices.

That any tax increase the county may impose to bail out the aquatic center will fall equally on Clarkston residents.

Or that Clarkston families will share in the loss if the aquatic center is diminished or closed.

CHEERS ... to John Mock of Lewiston. This morning brings to fruition Mock's quest to restore Idaho's first territorial Capitol building to Lewiston. In a matter of hours, contractors will put up the walls and roof on the territorial Capitol replica taking shape at the corner of 12th and Main streets. Later to come will be exteriors, windows, historical memorabilia and a permanent location.

The structure served as the birthplace of Idaho's government in 1863 and 1864.

It was under construction 150 years ago this month.

This physical link to the past will serve as a commemorative monument to an Idaho territory that was taking shape in the shadow of the Civil War. And all paths leading to it - the vision, much of the research, the promotion and the fundraising - converge with Mock.

"John's vision and enthusiasm that we were going to get this thing done has been the glue, the catalyst for this whole project," said Garry Bush, president of the First Territorial Capitol of Idaho Revitalization Project.

CHEERS ... to AARP of Idaho. It's launching a campaign - dubbed "You've Earned a Say" - to engage Idahoans about looming changes to Medicare and Social Security. Go to www.earnedasay.org to learn more. The website is informational - it draws experts on the left and right and invites people to express their own views.

What's intriguing about the AARP program is the way it demonstrates how much ordinary Idahoans depend on Social Security:

- Without Social Security, 39 percent of Idaho's senior citizens would be living below the federal poverty line - \$11,170 for an individual and \$15,130 for a couple.
- Two-thirds of Idaho's seniors rely on Social Security for half their income.
- One in six Idahoans draws a Social Security check.

Its rhetoric of rugged individualism notwithstanding, Idaho has the 49th lowest per capita income in the country.

In Idaho, Social Security is a lifeline. - M.T.