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Daily Interlake-Editorial: SWAMP CRITTERS TARGET RYAN ZINKE, BUT I'M BETTING ON THE SEAL

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If anything speaks authoritatively on the partisan mess that is Washington, D.C., it is the vilification of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, seemingly the left's favorite target after President Trump himself.

Just last week, former government ethics chief and serial Trump critic Walter Shaub made headlines when he called Zinke "the poster child for this lawless administration's misuse of governmental authority and resources."

Well, pardon my disbelief, but when Zinke was a member of the Montana Legislature, he was the "poster child" for moderate Republicans. In the preceding 30 years, he was also the "poster child" for over-achievers (He was a 4.0 student at Whitefish High School, as well as class president and football star). Later he was a "poster child" for military heroes, serving as a Navy SEAL in both Iraq wars, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan. Then he was Montana's lone congressman, elected twice by the people who know him best.

Here at the Inter Lake, we got to know him as a state legislator, a local businessman, and even as a member of our editorial board for a brief tenure. In every instance, we saw in Ryan Zinke a willingness to look at both sides of an issue, but not to talk out of both sides of his mouth. He was plainspoken to the point of being brutally honest and he made it his personal mission to "restore trust in government."

It is therefore with considerable bewilderment that I have watched the Democratic establishment and the national media try to paint Zinke as some sort of Neanderthal jet-setter criss-crossing the country with a club in one hand and an arsonist's match in the other.

A lot of the issues raised about Secretary Zinke do seem to revolve around travel — taking charter flights on several occasions, bringing his wife with him on flights while he was traveling on official business, selling a campaign-related RV to a friend and fellow Republican at a favorable price. Really? Do you really think other Cabinet members have not used charter flights in the past? Besides, Zinke says that his office is spending less on noncommercial air travel than the previous two secretaries. What's wrong with that? As for the RV, it's up to buyer and seller what price a vehicle is worth. Zinke is not the first person to offer a friend a good deal on a vehicle.

How about this headline from Mother Jones magazine: "The Interior Department Is Giving Business to Secretary Zinke's Billionaire Pal." Wow! That's scandalous! Until you read the story

and find out that the business amounted to three night's lodging at Whitefish Mountain Resort for 99 bucks a night. An Interior Department official needed a place to stay while attending the Western Governors Association meeting in Whitefish last June. Sure, Bill Foley, the majority owner of the resort, is a friend of Zinke, but who cares? Has Mother Jones ever been to Whitefish? It's a small world, and probably every hotel owner in the town of 5,000 people knows Zinke. And do we really think that Foley became Zinke's "pal" so that he could somehow get the corner on that \$297 of hotel lodging income?

And we wonder why most Americans have no interest in running for office or serving in government! As for Lola Zinke traveling with her husband, why exactly should the Cabinet secretary's wife NOT travel with him? Considering all the stories coming out of D.C. about the antics of other men, we think it might be a good idea if more men in high office traveled with their wives.

Finally, the high crime that drove Walter Shaub crazy was that Zinke had retweeted a message from the House Natural Resources Committee about a squabble over President Trump's decision to shrink several national monuments.

As interior secretary, Zinke had recommended that Trump greatly reduce the size of the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, among others. The outdoor retailer Patagonia took offense at this move, and sent out an online message that "The President Stole Your Land." Zinke told reporters the claim was "nefarious, false and a lie." He also retweeted the House committee's claim that "Patagonia Is Lying To You."

Shaub said, Zinke had "misused his official position by re-tweeting this wildly inappropriate tweet," and that his "thuggish interference with a business is outside the scope of his duties," suggesting that Patagonia should sue him for libel.

Well, sorry, but if Patagonia wants to engage in a debate about public policy, they had better be prepared for a fight. We know Ryan Zinke is, and we suspect he is better armed.

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