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Labrador says GOP has best route to prosperity

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By William L. Spence of the Tribune
Congressman fields questions at Lewiston town hall meeting



Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador speaks at Lewis-Clark State College Tuesday night....

Rather than the evil effort to give more tax breaks to the wealthy while cutting services for the poor and elderly that opponents have portrayed it as, Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, says the Republican budget proposal is actually an attempt to save the country from bankruptcy.

The "Path to Prosperity" proposal, also referred to as the Ryan plan after House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, would revamp the Medicare/Medicaid system and reduce federal spending by upwards of \$4 trillion over the next decade.

Speaking to about 100 people at a town hall meeting in Lewiston Tuesday evening, Labrador said the first thing people need to understand is the plan wouldn't affect Medicare benefits for anyone who's 55 or older.

For people younger than 55, a voucher system would be implemented to help subsidize the cost of private-market health insurance.

In general, he said, wealthier individuals would get less federal support while sick and low-income individuals would receive more support.

During a brief presentation at the start of the meeting, Labrador noted the federal government is currently borrowing about \$4 billion every day - almost double what Idaho spends on its general fund budget for an entire year.

"We can't sustain that level of spending," he said. "If we do nothing, we're going to go bankrupt and then Medicare and Medicaid will be gone entirely. That's what we're trying to prevent. We have a small window of time in which to fix things."

Higher Medicare and Medicaid costs are a major driver of the increase in federal spending, Labrador said. While the Ryan plan wouldn't cut spending for the two programs, it would reduce the rate of growth in spending.

Audience members had a variety of ideas about how to bring federal spending under control. One man suggested the government should stop "rewarding bad behavior" by providing lucrative benefits to people who fake disabilities or who have children out of wedlock. Another said oil companies could afford to lose their \$40 billion in tax breaks more easily than seniors or single mothers.

Labrador said if Republicans want to have any credibility on budget issues, "then everything needs to be on the table. We can't just look at programs that are important to (Democrats) and say our programs are sacrosanct. If oil companies are getting tax breaks just for that industry, we need to look at it."

He got a round of applause when he said he'd prefer to go to a flat tax and get rid of all tax exemptions.

"It think it's fairer for everyone," he said. "We could lower the tax rate for everyone and broaden the tax base. If people are making money, they should pay some tax."

Labrador fielded a number of other questions from the audience during the two-hour meeting, ranging from his views on Chinese human rights violations to efforts to reduce government regulation. He'll also be speaking at a Republican Party luncheon at the 1912 Building in Moscow today from about 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
