

# This shoestring group scares Labrador

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, has raised \$628,057 in campaign contributions and has \$203,000 in the bank.

Labrador's Democratic opponent, Jimmy Farris, has raised \$37,388.

Labrador is a Tea Party darling. He's a Republican in a state where the party label matters to voters.

Farris is running on the same ticket with Barack Obama.

Labrador is experienced — having served one term in the House and two in the Idaho Legislature.

Before this campaign, Farris' political background was limited to voting — just once. He's a political neophyte and it shows.

Labrador is on a glide path toward winning a second term. So what is Labrador afraid of? Why is he running away from Project Vote Smart?

Not that Project Vote Smart is all that frightening. It's a shoestring operation run from a ranch 40 minutes from Philipsburg, Mont.

For an organization with a national reach, it runs a tight ship. It has a \$1 million budget. Much of the money comes from small, individual donations that average \$45. No checks from corporations or special interests are accepted.

Project Vote Smart relies on volunteers and college students, who put in between two and 10 weeks without pay, to do much of the work.

There's no special interest or partisan slant. Its board includes players from both sides of the political spectrum. Founding members included former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, conservative icon Barry Goldwater and liberal stalwart George McGovern.

All Project Vote Smart does is collect information about candidates — where they get their money, how they vote, what they've said in public statements, which political lobbies like them and which don't and where they stand on the issues.

Then it distributes the information to voters.

You can retrieve it at [www.VoteSmart.org](http://www.VoteSmart.org) or at (888) 868-3762.

At the operation's core is a simple questionnaire. On your behalf, Vote Smart asks candidates to spell out where they stand on issues such as abortion, government spending, taxes, campaign finance and government reform, crime and public safety, the economy, education, environment, energy, guns, health and social issues.

Until it is vetted by political scientists, journalists and advisers for relevance and balance, no question is asked.

Says Vote Smart, taking the test is a matter of courage. Doing so strips away from candidates the layers of protection they get from campaign commercials, friendly special interest lobbies and staged political events.

Sadly, most politicians are failing this political courage test.

Except in Idaho.

Every candidate running for Idaho's two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives has taken the survey and filled out at least some of the questions.

Every candidate, that is, except Labrador.

In the 2nd Congressional District, incumbent Mike Simpson passed the political courage test for the sixth time in his eight terms in the U.S. House.

His Democratic opponent, state Sen. Nicole LeFavour of Boise replied, although she gave answers so evasive that you can't really tell where she stands on many of the issues.

Among Labrador's opponents, Pro-Life (formerly known as Marvin Richardson) of Letha and Libertarian Rob Oats of Caldwell, filled out the questionnaire and passed. Farris came in too late to claim the political courage mantle, but his answers are available at Vote Smart's website.

This isn't anything new. Labrador has run away from the political courage test in each of his four campaigns. This is not especially astonishing behavior from a politician with a virtual lock on re-election.

But Labrador is taking the coward's

way out. — M.T.