

# Labrador won't find Simpson at his back

*Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune*

For a politician, Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, has a quirky habit.

When he's asked a question, he answers it. Frankly.

Such was the case last week. The Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey sought Simpson's response to 1st District Congressman Raul Labrador's involvement in a failed coup against House Speaker John Boehner.

Labrador was among three ringleaders who sought to deny Boehner a first-ballot victory, figuring another leader would emerge. When that plot failed, Labrador was among a dozen Republicans who either did not vote or supported someone else over Boehner.

"I think there are 15 or 16 members of our conference that have substantially lost credibility," Simpson told Popkey. "He just didn't vote ... which, as anyone who's ever been in a legislative body will tell you, you got one thing going for you and that's your credibility. And once you lose that credibility it's gone and it's gone forever."

No harsher criticism can come from one lawmaker of another. You can disagree about issues. You can challenge judgment. But trust and personal relationships are the coin of the realm in Congress. To say a member has lost his credibility goes to the core of that person's effectiveness, if not trustworthiness.

Idaho's small congressional delegation has had its tensions before.

Former U.S. Sen. Jim McClure, R-Idaho, challenged his Democratic colleague Frank Church's investigation into the intelligence community in the 1970s.

In the 1990s, Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, blocked Democratic Congressman Larry LaRocco's nomination of Lewiston attorney John Tait to the federal judiciary.

During the last decade, it was no secret that Simpson and former Congressman Bill Sali had tangled with each other when they served together in the state Legislature.

But this is a precedent. And with Simpson, it's about principle.

He's a man of the House.

A former Idaho House speaker, he went to Washington, D.C., in the 1990s schooled in the art of the possible.

He made it a point to meet his fellow members of Congress. He worked his way toward the epicenter of the appropriations process and the House conference leadership.

To him, compromising was a road map toward solving the nation's problems and serving the interests of those who elected him in the first place.

Labrador would burn the House down.

To him, half a loaf isn't good enough. He voted against raising the nation's debt limit, regardless of the risk to a fragile global economy.

If he couldn't get his way, he'd support deep budget cuts for the Idaho National Laboratory, even though it would undermine the economy in Simpson's district.

In the name of preventing tax cuts for no more than 7,000 upper-income Idahoans, he essentially voted to hike taxes on more than 717,000 Idaho taxpayers.

And when Popkey caught up to him, Labrador fired back at Simpson as a "bully" and "an old-school legislator that went to Washington, D.C., to compromise. ... That's how you get to a \$1 trillion deficit, by just tinkering around the edges."

Such vitriol tells you these two no longer belong to the same political party.

There's the Republican Party of Simpson, Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, the business wing of the GOP and its moderate legislators.

And there is the Republican Party of Labrador, schools Superintendent Tom Luna and the Tea Partiers who infiltrated the machinery of the state GOP.

This tells you something else. Less than a week after he kicked the king without killing him, Labrador has found himself isolated. If he can't count on the support of his only fellow Idahoan in the House of Representatives, where else does he expect to find it? - M.T.