

Labrador morphs into Dr. No from Idaho

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Last week, Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, voted against a modest, bipartisan budget bill that avoids another government shutdown or two.

The reason?

The deal cancels about \$63 billion in spending cuts between defense and ordinary, so-called "discretionary" government programs - part of a larger package of reductions dubbed the "sequester."

"Those spending increases gut the hard-won spending cuts Republicans fought for during the debt ceiling battle of 2011, otherwise known as the 'sequester,'" Labrador said. "The 'sequester' - which ended up generating bipartisan support, and was signed into law by President Obama - forced necessary and long-overdue cuts in discretionary spending."

Setting aside the argument that when the dust settles, this deal cuts the deficit by \$23 billion during the next decade, why is Labrador so enamored of the sequester?

When Congress enacted the measure in 2011, Labrador was among the 161 no votes.

Even before Congressman Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., had inked their deal, Labrador had signed up to oppose it. He was among 19 House Republicans urging Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor to avoid a budget deal and just pass a "clean" continuing resolution, essentially locking government spending in place.

"... We encourage you to allow a vote as soon as practicable on a full-year 'clean CR' funding bill at levels established in law by the Budget Control Act," they wrote.

But only a few months before Labrador got behind a "clean CR," he was against it. Labrador joined 78 other House Republicans who endorsed North Carolina Congressman Mark Meadows' plan to block any CR that included funding for Obamacare.

"... We urge you to affirmatively defund the implementation and enforcement of Obamacare in any relevant appropriations bill brought to the House floor in the 113th Congress, including any continuing appropriations bill," their letter said.

Whatever else you want to call Meadows' idea, that is not the definition of a "clean CR."

So what other reason could Labrador have for opposing the budget deal?

Certainly not the interests of his constituents in this readership area. As this page noted, a "clean CR" virtually eliminated the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program. That's because under the current law, Congress must act affirmatively to renew PILT.

In Idaho, that's worth \$26.3 million - including \$1.52 million to Idaho County, \$628,098 to Clearwater County, \$231,833 to Latah County, \$7,422 to Lewis County and \$74,007 to Nez Perce County.

Nor can he cite his ideological brothers and sisters in the House GOP. Of the 144 Republicans who voted to continue the government shutdown last October, 82 switched sides this time and voted for a compromise.

Ryan wasn't the only hard-liner to back the budget deal. Others included Reps. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., Tom Price, R-Ga., and Greg Walden, R-Ore.

That means 169 House Republicans voted yes. Labrador was among a very much exposed rump faction of 62 GOP members voting no.

Even in the West's conservative Republican caucus, that margin holds up. Of the 14 Republicans elected from Idaho and its six neighboring states, 10 - including Labrador's seatmate, Mike Simpson - backed the deal. Only three - Steve Daines of Montana, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming and Joseph Heck of Nevada - joined Labrador.

How can Idaho's two-term congressman wind up on both sides of the sequester and clean continuing resolution issues?

Why is he among a steadily shrinking group of holdouts who embrace congressional dysfunction?

Whether it's last year's budget deal, immigration reform or even boosting Idaho's minimum wage, he's against it. What is he for?

Enlighten us, congressman. - M.T.