

Flubbing a convention doesn't stop Labrador

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Here's how not to win the race for majority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives:

Run Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, for the post.

That's the equivalent of casting Jonah Hill as James Bond, Vince Vaughn as

Spider-Man and Ben Stiller as Captain Jack Sparrow.

It makes about as much sense as signing up 5-foot-11 Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson as the San Antonio Spurs' power forward.

Or handing Microsoft's Bill Gates a post-hole digger and telling him to get busy.

Labrador is up against House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy, the frontrunner to succeed deposed Majority Leader Eric Cantor.

McCarthy is part of the leadership team, a veteran and plugged in. As the Washington Examiner noted Monday, McCarthy was working the cellphones while Labrador was still trying to find the numbers.

"If you don't have the contact numbers - much less have ever spoken with someone - you can't get the votes," the Examiner quoted one unnamed Republican.

Labrador gave McCarthy - who was working the race almost from the second Cantor lost his re-election June 10 - a head start. Labrador waited until Friday the 13th to announce his plans, giving him six days to campaign.

Then there's Labrador himself.

At the national level, he's a bomb thrower. He was among the ringleaders who waged an abortive coup against Speaker John Boehner in 2013. He's been at war with his Idaho seatmate, Congressman Mike Simpson. His press secretary sicced the House ethics cops on House Republican Conference Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash.

He's known more for what he wouldn't do - pass immigration reform or keep the government from shutting down - than for what he would accomplish.

At home, the story is the same. To the people of his state dependent upon federal programs, the answer is usually: No.

No to funding for the Idaho National Laboratory.

No to programs that bolster rural schools and counties.

No to farm bills.

No to veterans.

Not to mention his combative edge, whether it's endorsing Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's Republican primary opponent, Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian, or heading over to the INL's backyard to lecture the people of Idaho Falls about why he's right and they're wrong.

With that much working against him, you'd think Labrador would have devoted the weekend in Washington, D.C., to working the phones.

Nope. He was out in Moscow wielding the gavel at the Idaho Republican Convention.

Otter and Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, popped in and out, while Simpson had the good sense to avoid the conflagration entirely. But Labrador signed on to preside over the contentious Saturday floor session.

Ask around and you'll hear complaints.

Lots of complaints.

That Labrador wasn't prepared.

That he didn't know how to run a meeting.

That he helped disenfranchise the moderate delegates from Bannock County and was about to do the same to delegates from Ada and Power counties.

That he helped shut down the whole affair at mid-afternoon without adopting a party platform or electing new officers.

It's been called a "fiasco."

"Dysfunctional."

The New York Times' Jackie Calmes characterized it as "militants amok."

It was more like the political equivalent of a dirty bomb, contaminating anyone who got close - and Labrador was at ground zero.

Which is fine for an Idaho politician who clearly must know by now that his antagonism of Idaho's 2nd Congressional District means he's a goner for any statewide office.

Still, it contradicts a congressional leadership candidate who will tell anyone willing to listen - notably the conservative radio talk show circuit of Sean Hannity, Mark Levin and Hugh Hewitt - that he's a uniter, not a divider.

"The simple fact is Republicans will never again unite the country until we first unite our party," Labrador said Monday.

The House GOP votes Thursday. This is politics, so nothing is certain. Still, to the folks at home watching their congressman's latest antics, this has the feel of the wrong man going after the wrong job at the wrong time. - M.T.