

# For Labrador, it was a fun day at the office

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank says California's Kevin McCarthy "clobbered" Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador in the race for House majority leader.

No count emerged, but the race was deemed so lopsided that the Washington media gravitated toward a real contest - who was going to replace McCarthy as whip.

They could see Labrador losing people who disagreed with his Tea Party proclivities.

"If the job of the majority leader were to get everybody to vote no - well, then the other guy would've won the race," Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pa., told Milbank.

Then he forfeited some of his allies on the right wing.

Some, like Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, called him squishy on immigration because the Idaho Republican had at least contemplated a reform bill.

"Labrador is pro amnesty," King wrote. "If not this year, he has strongly advocated for amnesty next year. No fair trying to redefine amnesty."

Even a few found Labrador too much of a dove on defense and national security, citing votes to pull troops out of Europe on the eve of the Ukrainian crisis as well as pulling resources out of Afghanistan.

Not to mention those who may agree with Labrador on the issues but consider him - as Milbank put it - a "bomb thrower" given his dust-ups with seatmate Mike Simpson, Speaker John Boehner and GOP Conference Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash.

We're talking about intraparty leadership contests - the very thing that will leave animosities to fester and scores to be settled.

Don't forget: For Labrador, the week began with him presiding over an Idaho Republican convention that dissolved into chaos and acrimony.

All of which has got to sting.

And yet, here was Labrador talking to reporters Friday: "This has truly been one of the funnest experiences that I've ever had."

"Funnest?"

Anybody who enjoyed what Labrador endured last week does not define success by what occurs under the Capitol Dome.

He's not concerned with the legislative equivalent of hitting singles and doubles, measuring progress by passage of an amendment here or a bill there.

Networking with his fellow members of Congress is not his shtick. While McCarthy lined up commitments face to face from his fellow Republicans, Labrador campaigned for the leadership post by showing up on Laura Ingraham's radio program.

Someone who enjoyed or at least doesn't mind getting clobbered is swinging for the political fences. He's appealing to a national audience.

Just running for majority leader got Labrador on the national radar. Of his new notoriety, Labrador told reporters: "You've got to use everything to your advantage."

Don't knock it. This is a well-worn path.

For all his attributes, the late Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., was more show pony than work horse. You won't find much legislation bearing his imprint. By spending more time outside Washington, D.C., and making the rounds of television programs, Goldwater became the face of the modern conservative resurgence, capturing the GOP presidential nomination in 1964.

What's losing a congressional leadership post compared to building a national brand? At the very least, Labrador seems poised to join the club of congressional celebrities - Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, or Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky.

Once you tire of elective office, the opportunities are endless. You can wind up on a lucrative speaking circuit or follow in the footsteps of former Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C, who is earning a fortune as president of The Heritage Foundation, or former Rep. Chris Chocola, R-Ind., who runs the Club for Growth.

Reporters pressed Labrador about his plans, but he was noncommittal: "We'll see. Right now, I'm running for re-election."

Clearly what occurs beyond the Capitol Dome is good for Labrador.

Unfortunately for the 700,000 Idahoans who sent Labrador to Washington, it means being left out in the cold. - M.T.