

# Labrador took sides on child support mess

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

If Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador is not prepared to help the 183,000 children dependent upon the state's now-jeopardized child support enforcement, at least he could keep it to himself.

Instead, Labrador is helping his allies in the Idaho Legislature blow up that system.

Idaho's Health and Welfare Department collects about \$205 million from non-custodial parents and allocates it to 155,000 households. To do that job, the state relies on access to federal databases and about \$16 million in federal cash.

All that could disappear. On April 10, as lawmakers were about to adjourn for the year, the House Judiciary and Rules Committee, on a 9-8 vote, tabled a bill that would have brought state child support enforcement into compliance with federal law.

The feds have given Idaho until mid-June to remedy the action. Otherwise, the state may become a potential haven for deadbeat dads and moms and a financial hell hole for their kids.

If anything, committee members doubled down on their vote. Rep. Lynn Luker, R-Boise, was the first. On April 11, he released a statement expressing his alarm at the system's potential for due process violations and the enforcement of international court orders in Idaho. He called the measure an example of federal heavy-handedness.

He also had access to a 2013 Congressional Research Service report citing personal privacy concerns with the federal act.

Turns out Luker had help.

Combing through 700 pages of emails and other documents Luker turned over as part of a public records request, the Associated Press found Labrador's fingerprints.

In an April 11 exchange with former state Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow, who serves as House GOP caucus spokeswoman, Luker wrote: "Cindy, Raul suggested we keep it simple. ... If people have questions, we can provide more information."

Labrador was honing Luker's argument. So he certainly didn't disagree with it.

Nor was Labrador responding to an appeal from his friend for help. According to "Idaho Reports" host Melissa Davlin, the congressman volunteered.

That's rare. By custom, most members of Idaho's congressional delegation - from Democrat Frank Church to Republican Jim Risch - avoid injecting themselves in state politics. They're

busy enough with federal issues, they're 2,000 miles away and they're not fully briefed on state matters.

Labrador sees himself as the exception. Two years ago, he took it upon himself to lobby his former colleagues in the state Capitol to defeat Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's effort to set up a state-based exchange to administer subsidized health insurance under Obamacare.

Moreover, Labrador and the rest of Idaho's delegation already passed on this child support enforcement issue. About six months ago, the federal law cleared the U.S. Senate unanimously. On July 23, it passed the House by voice vote.

But now, after informing Davlin of his neutrality just last week, Labrador says he shares Luker's concerns: "You always have to worry about the due process rights that other countries have."

What are Labrador's GOP friends in the Statehouse who voted against the federal law - such as Reps. Kathleen Sims of Coeur d'Alene, Don Cheatham of Post Falls, Shannon McMillan of Silverton and Heather Scott of Blanchard - to think when they hear that?

Keep it up? Don't back off?

Labrador may say this is a non-story blown entirely out of context. But if this isn't where he stands, it's long past time for him to say so.

Taking a page from Hillary Clinton, Luker zapped his private emails, which may have shed more light on Labrador's role. Although he's under no federal obligation to do so, Labrador could comply with the AP's request to release his own email exchanges with Luker.

Or he could simply echo 2nd District Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson's statement of support "for the bill and with those in Idaho who believe the Legislature needs to fix this issue."

But Labrador can no longer take refuge in silence.

The evidence contradicts him. - M.T.