

# Labrador finds fault with GOP budget plan

*Idaho rep votes against resolution, saying it could prevent party from reclaiming White House in 2016*

**William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune**

Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador says a highly touted GOP budget resolution is "irresponsible and unrealistic" and could cost Republicans a shot at the White House next year.

The resolution was approved 226-197 last week by the U.S. House of Representatives. It passed the Senate Tuesday on a 51-48 vote, making it the first GOP budget plan to pass both bodies in nearly a decade.

The measure lays out a path toward balancing the federal budget in 10 years, without raising taxes. It proposes nearly \$500 billion in non-defense discretionary spending cuts during that time, as well as another \$4.2 trillion in entitlement cuts to programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and higher education Pell Grants. It also increases military spending to \$563 billion per year, in part by pumping an additional \$40 billion into an off-budget account.

In addition, the resolution includes a provision allowing the House and Senate to vote on repealing Obamacare without the option of a filibuster.

Labrador was one of 14 House Republicans and two Senate Republicans to oppose the bill. No Democrats voted for it.

In an interview prior to a town hall meeting Wednesday in Lewiston, Labrador said the resolution doesn't strengthen GOP chances in the 2016 presidential race.

"When we say we're going to increase military spending and cut everyone else's programs, that's not a winning message for the Republican Party," he said. "Essentially we're saying we'll put moms and dads and babies at risk, just so the military can have more money."

Labrador said he has "no problem" with reducing government spending, but thinks the cuts should be across-the-board, rather than by picking winners and losers.

"Republicans have to put their sacred cows on the table along with everyone else," he said. "I think my party is being irresponsible by saying we're going to increase military spending and not increase anything else. That's just not realistic."

The resolution creates non-binding guidelines for the various appropriations bills that will be approved later this year. However, there's already speculation that any bills based on the guidelines will fail, meaning the parties will end up negotiating a compromise.

Labrador worries that approach could undo discretionary spending caps that were put in place in 2011. The caps have helped reduce annual budget deficits by two-thirds.

"We'll see deficits start to increase again," he said. "That will undo all the work we've done over the last four years."

A more realistic approach to balancing the budget necessarily involves entitlement reform, Labrador said, but that's a politically risky decision that many lawmakers are unwilling to make.

"If we look at how to make Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid sustainable, we'd be able to balance the budget in 10 to 20 years," he said. "But people aren't willing to do that. We can't agree on entitlement reforms, so we just keep adding to the debt. That's the easiest way. There isn't a political price for adding to the debt."

Labrador has long advocated for Congress to have an "honest conversation" with the American people so a consensus can be reached on how to reform entitlement programs and reduce spending. He's even willing to consider some level of revenue enhancement, although he wants spending cuts to come first.

"If we cut \$10 for every \$1 increase in taxes - absolutely," he said. "But the key is the cuts have to come first. The problem in Washington is that it wants to increase taxes today, with the promise of future spending cuts that never materialize."

Labrador is supporting Sen. Rand Paul in the 2016 presidential race, saying the Kentucky lawmaker shares his views on a strong military and fiscally responsible budgeting. Whoever the nominee ends up being, though, they'll need to have a message "that speaks to the average American."

"Republicans make the mistake of speaking to companies and business owners," he said. "Every Republican policy has to benefit 'job creators,' but we forget job creators are only a small portion of the American people. We have to show how our policies benefit everyone, how society and individuals will be better off and communities stronger if we follow conservative policies. And that's easy to do: You just show them how you care for them. You want them to be successful and want their children to have a better life."

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