

No favorites

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CHEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. He had plenty of reasons to stand apart from his party and oppose its congressional budget plan:

- It seeks to balance the budget entirely through cuts - about \$5 trillion during the next decade - without raising one new dollar in taxes.
- Nearly two-thirds of the savings would come from domestic programs that serve low- and moderate-income families. Among them would be Medicaid, nutrition and college grants.
- By cutting tax credits for low-income families, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities says the budget would throw 16 million people even deeper into poverty
- It would more than double cuts in education, job training, transportation, research and veterans health care.

But for Labrador, the most compelling was simple fairness. Republicans were playing

favorites, using a gimmick to slide more money over to defense, something former House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan last year called "a back-door loophole that undermines the integrity of the budget process."

So Labrador voted no.

Twice.

On March 25, he was among 17 House Republicans who joined 182 Democrats in opposing the measure.

On April 30, he was one of 14 House Republicans who combined with 183 Democrats in rejecting the deal.

Tuesday, the Senate finalized it largely on a party-line vote. Only Texas' Ted Cruz and Kentucky's Rand Paul joined 46 Democrats to vote no.

"Republicans have to put their sacred cows on the table along with everyone else," Labrador told the Tribune's William L. Spence Wednesday. "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."

In so doing, Labrador cut through the budget gimmickry. He voted the right way. And he said the right things.

Good for him.

JEERS ... to Washington State Auditor Troy Kelley. He should be a private citizen now that federal prosecutors have filed a 10-count felony indictment against him alleging theft, lying under oath and tax evasion.

Just about anyone you ask - from Gov. Jay Inslee to Kelley's former Democratic colleagues in the House of Representatives - think it's time for Kelley to quit.

"If you put this out for a vote on the floor of the House tomorrow, I have a hard time imagining that a single member of the House wouldn't vote for removal," Rep. Chris Hurst, D-Enumclaw, told the Olympian's Jordan Schrader.

Instead, Kelley began an unpaid leave of absence Monday - waiting until the last minute to collect an extra month's worth of taxpayer-provided health insurance - and delegated director of operations Jan Jutte to take charge.

If Kelley lacks the grace to go willingly, how do you get rid of him?

Only a felony conviction would trigger Kelley's removal.

Short of that, there's impeachment - but the federal charges deal with his private business affairs before he took office. Recall could take months.

Even if lawmakers pass a bill declaring an office vacant in the case of a leave of absence - with exceptions for health and military service - it could not be enforced retroactively against Kelley.

Were Kelley to resign before Monday, the voters would have a chance to elect someone to fill out the remainder of his term. If he waits, an unelected appointee - either Jutte, if Kelley continues to cling to the title, or someone Inslee names if he quits - will serve out the term.

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Steve Yates. Remember last fall when the carpetbagger party boss blundered into appointing former U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, as the GOP's financial chairman?

It kept getting worse.

Within weeks, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson declared Craig had mishandled his own campaign funds by using the money on attorneys seeking to overturn his 2007 guilty plea in a case stemming from his career-killing arrest in a gay sex sting operation at a Minneapolis airport men's room.

Jackson said Craig's donors did not give him money in good faith to convert to his private legal use - and ordered him to repay \$242,535 to the treasury.

Now, seven months later, Craig's finances are in the news again. He was about three weeks late in filing his quarterly financial statement with the Federal Elections Commission. Keep in mind, Craig has been meeting FEC deadlines dating back to his first congressional campaign in 1980.

How long do you think it's going to take Yates to admit he made a mistake?

JEERS ... to Idaho Secretary of State Lawrence (Boss) Denney. Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter didn't follow the Constitution. Neither did the state Senate. And Denney is looking the other way.

At issue was Otter's flawed veto of a bill outlawing instant racing machines - essentially slots - from Idaho racetracks at Garden City, Post Falls and Idaho Falls.

Otter took longer than the five days Idaho's Constitution allots him to return his veto to the state Senate. Rather than acknowledging the measure had taken effect without his signature, Otter continued to insist he had followed the law.

When the measure reached the Senate floor, three officials -President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, Secretary of the Senate Jennifer Novak and Minority Leader Michelle Stennett, D-Ketchum - formally noted Otter had missed the constitutional deadline. Rather than stand its ground, the chamber proceeded to sustain the governor's veto.

That leaves Denney. If the veto is invalid, then it's up to him to certify the bill as having become law.

We know what his predecessor, Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, would have done. In 1976, Gov. Cecil D. Andrus vetoed a bill sought by Attorney General Wayne Kidwell.

Kidwell argued Andrus took too long. So Cenarrusa certified the bill as having become law.

If Andrus didn't like it, the governor could sue - which he did and the Idaho Supreme Court weighed in two years later.

Instead, Denney blocked the bill's enactment.

Ask a lawyer and he'll tell you it's a closer call this time around. But Denney erred on the side of his fellow Republicans rather than private citizens, who now bear the legal burden of holding them accountable. - M.T.