

# Does Cruz speak for Labrador - or vice versa?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Congressman Raul Labrador was Idaho's highest ranking supporter of Sen. Ted Cruz, who cleaned up in the state's GOP presidential primary Tuesday - on a night when Donald Trump won everywhere else.

But Cruz tied Labrador to a presidential campaign that would liquidate Idaho's federal lands. Speaking in Boise last weekend, Cruz said: "Too much land in this country, particularly in the West, is owned by the federal government. It's not right. It doesn't make sense. So we need to transfer that land back to the states - or even better, back to the people."

Apparently, Cruz thinks divestiture will save the federal government money because he expects the proceeds to be plowed back into maintaining the national parks. But the feds will benefit at Idaho's expense.

At Congressman Mike Simpson's request, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service looked into it and concluded the state would lose at least \$392 million a year managing those federal lands - and that's not counting another \$101 million fighting fires.

The University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group figured the only way Idaho could avoid losing money would be logging these lands at levels not seen in 40 years and then profiting from a healthy timber market that never goes bust.

You know what happens next.

To cover its bills, the state either raises taxes, cuts education or sells off those lands to the highest bidder.

Where does that leave Labrador?

On one hand, the congressman wants to field test the idea of states managing small tracts of federal lands across the West - no more than 4 million of the 193 million national forest acres.

On the other, he now has to explain himself to Idahoans who have rejected federal land transfers every time the question has come up. Case in point was Boise State University's latest public policy survey, which found support for a public lands transfer dropped to 39.3 percent if Idaho had to pay for it.

That's not the only landmine Cruz left behind for Labrador.

Over in eastern Idaho, members of the Idaho National Laboratory community are zeroing in on Cruz's plan to shut down the U.S. Department of Energy. Even if - as Labrador argued on an Idaho Falls radio program - Cruz would merely reorganize INL as part of the Department of Defense, site advocates see it as a threat to the lab's future.

As the Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker noted, much of INL's nuclear research portfolio would not be a good fit at Defense.

Barker also reported that Cruz said the site itself exemplifies "the kind of crony capitalism he hopes to end when he gets rid of the department. ..."

Standing by Cruz is a congressman who actually voted to strip \$514 million from nuclear energy research in 2012 - a move that would have shut down INL operations - as well as helped to engineer the federal government shutdown.

Since then, Labrador has reversed himself. But as a potential candidate for governor in two years, it's hardly his favorite topic to discuss with voters in eastern Idaho.

These are not minor points. Such questions have huge consequences for Labrador's state.

So which is it, Congressman? Do you agree with Cruz?

And if you don't, why are you standing by his side? - M.T.