

# Labrador seeks a path beyond Trump

**Chuck Malloy/Lewiston Tribune**

Congressman Raul Labrador says he could get behind efforts to knock out Donald Trump at the Republican National Convention, but only if different kingmakers were leading the charge.

If the plans were to put a conservative at the top of the ticket - such as Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, Rand Paul of Kentucky or Mike Lee of Utah - "some of us might get behind that," Raul said last week in a Capitol Hill press conference, "Conversations with Conservatives."

But that is not the case, he says. The mood is stronger for elevating an "establishment" figure, such as Jeb Bush, Mitt Romney or Gov. John Kasich of Ohio. As Labrador observes correctly, Bush was knocked out early in his presidential bid, Romney was the Republican loser in the last presidential election and Kasich couldn't win anything other than his home state.

"They don't want to listen to the 70 percent of the American people that rejected them," Labrador said.

OK - but if convention delegates nominated Lee for the presidency, as Labrador would be friendly toward, then the GOP would have a candidate who has "zero" support of the American people. That's not a formula for defeating Hillary Clinton.

Trump has earned his nomination fair and square, and by racking up delegates through the primary system. And that's driving the political establishment, and conservatives such as Labrador, nuts. It raises questions about the future of the congressional Freedom Caucus, a conservative movement that Labrador helped create.

And nobody knows a solution. Conservatives know they don't like Clinton, and aren't entirely sure they'd be getting a better deal with Trump.

Is he a conservative, or a liberal?

Is he going to cut the deficit and corporate tax rates? Or, is he going to add his own brand of big-spending government?

Is Trump the guy who can carry the torch for abolishing the Internal Revenue Service or impeaching the commissioner?

Probably not.

Republican Congressman Dave Brat of Virginia suggests that tensions could be eased if Trump's plans were more clear. He's suggesting that former House Speaker Newt Gingrich could help broker a deal between Trump and Ryan on a new version of "Contract with America," outlining a list of promises.

That's a good idea - if you believe in fairy tales. It's hard to imagine Trump and Ryan brokering a deal on a used car. And given Gingrich's recent harsh statements regarding Trump's attacks on a judge presiding in the case against Trump University, it's difficult to imagine him being on the Trump ticket in the fall.

This has not been a good year for the Freedom Caucus, which nine months ago was dubbed in a Time Magazine article as "a rebellion that could change the GOP's future." Labrador's first choice for president, Paul, was kicked out of the race fairly early. His second choice was Cruz, who lasted a long time, but saw that he did not have a path to the nomination. No one is arguing that Paul or Cruz have more political punch after their failed presidential runs.

Then, there are the swarms of twentysomethings who came out in droves to support Sen. Bernie Sanders in the Democratic race - those who adopted the rallying cry "Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what your country can do for you."

Sanders offered plenty of red meat, in the form of universal health care, free college education and a hefty minimum wage hike - and the heck with businesses that can't afford it.

To Sanders' credit, his socialist agenda has caught on big time with younger voters, who aren't sure whether they'll be able to collect Social Security and Medicare, but would like something that's more relevant to today's needs. Sanders' message, on the surface, has more appeal than the conservatives' call to cut corporate taxes and "say no" to almost everything else. Trump may work harder to get support from the Sanders' crowd than the Freedom Caucus.

The Freedom Caucus isn't dead by a long shot. The group has plans to roll out five pieces of legislation, including Labrador's "First Amendment Defense Act," which essentially is a religious freedom bill. And Labrador will continue to preside over the regular "Conversations with Conservatives," which gets some impressive national media exposure.

But with either Trump or Clinton as president, it's not likely that the White House will be paying much attention.

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