

Bait and switch

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. He's oozing with so much extra cash in his current campaign that he's already doling it out in advance of a GOP gubernatorial primary election two years from now.

But why cry poverty and beg Idahoans to contribute to his congressional bid?

Here's what he wrote in a fundraising letter Monday:

"The election is just about a week away and we are running out of time. If we're going to achieve our goal, we need everyone who opens this message to make an immediate contribution."

The very next day, the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell pored over federal election documents covering Labrador's activities through mid-October and found he had at least \$15,000 to spread around Idaho Republican legislative campaigns. Some 40 individuals - several of whom have nominal or even no opposition - picked up Raul Labrador for Idaho checks.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd figure he was running for speaker of the state House of Representatives there," College of Idaho professor of political economy Jasper LiCalzi told Russell. "Usually somebody who does that is interested in a leadership position in the Statehouse or something."

No, what Labrador is doing here is currying favor among people he'll need in the 2018 gubernatorial primary. Lt. Gov. Brad Little and former state Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian, already have jumped in. Labrador has not.

The 1st District congressman coyly told a KTVB debate with his Democratic opponent Jim Piotrowski that he won't decide whether to run until after Tuesday's election - and even then, won't leave Washington, D.C., until finishing criminal justice and immigration reform.

It's bad enough that he's asking for money he doesn't need. But what about his Tea Party followers? Imagine you're part of that group and you receive his urgent plea for cash. Rather than take your children to the movies this weekend, you send your favorite congressman a \$50 check.

How did it look when Labrador handed over \$500 to Rep. Caroline Nilsson Troy, R-Genesee? Wouldn't you expect Labrador to support your ally and fellow conservative, independent insurgent Ken De Vries of St. Maries instead? Or at least stay out of that race?

Say you were planning to take your wife out to dinner this weekend when Labrador's campaign put the squeeze on you. Being the devoted conservative who admires Labrador for putting principle before expediency, you opt to stay home Saturday, watch TV and send his campaign an extra \$100.

How did you feel about Labrador passing out \$500 and \$250 checks to Sens. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, Patti Anne Lodge, R-Caldwell, Marv Hagedorn, R-Meridian, Fred Martin, R-

Boise, Chuck Winder, R-Boise, and Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls, as well as state Reps. Patrick McDonald, R-Boise, and Steve Hartgen, R-Twin Falls?

Within the ranks of Idaho's so-called Republicans in Name Only, that's the Legion of Merit. Each one of them rated an "F" on the Idaho Freedom Foundation's Freedom Index.

This "bait and switch" may be the smart play for an ambitious politician, but wasn't Labrador the guy who didn't play the same old games?

And if Labrador would treat his base this way, what about the rest of us? Would you buy a used car from this man?

JEERS ... to Lt. Gov. Little. Never a word of dissent has escaped Little's lips while Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has made one mess after another.

That has to change, of course, if Little is going to win his race for governor in 2018.

But why did Little choose to break with Otter over the one issue where the governor is right?

Case in point: The legislative power grab on Tuesday's election ballot - House Joint Resolution 5. As Otter pointed out last week, it would give lawmakers even more power to veto and possibly alter rules and regulations state agencies draft. Just about every state industry with a checkbook is helping an advertising campaign to pass it.

Here comes Little with an opportunistic ploy to win favor with those industries - and the Republican lawmakers behind the measure.

"Two principles of government that endure from our country's founding are constitutionalism, and checks and balances," Little wrote. "Both help to limit the reach of government over citizens."

If Little believes that, he's on the wrong side. The fact is HJR 5 would disrupt a finely tuned equilibrium among Idaho's three branches of government.

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Executive Director Dave Johnston and Republican legislative candidate Mike Kingsley of Lewiston.

Let Idaho Secretary of State Lawrence "Boss" Denney decide whether the state GOP and the Kingsley campaign violated state Sunshine laws as Idaho Democrats alleged last week. But comb through the email traffic in which Johnston is discussing tactics to defeat Kingsley's rival, state Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, and you'll find this comment:

"Let's go scalp this guy."

This is not some John Ford Western from the 1940s. You don't hear that kind of language anymore - and for good reason. It's an ethnic slur. It's part of a vicious stereotype aimed at Native Americans.

What have you heard from Johnston since this emerged Saturday? An apology? An explanation? Nope. Just the sound of crickets.

And what about Kingsley?

Why hasn't he disavowed a statement that is hurtful to many of the people he hopes to represent in Boise? Has he nothing to say to them?

CHEERS ... to Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

When the "Access Hollywood" tape exposing GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump as a sexual predator emerged on Oct. 7, Simpson faced a choice. His fellow Republican, Sen. Mike Crapo, had already withdrawn his support.

Said Simpson: "I find his recent comments about women deplorable. In my opinion, he has demonstrated that he is unfit to be president and I cannot support him."

Then came the inevitable backlash and Crapo went into a slow-motion 180 - first telling "Idaho Reports" that "I cannot and will not vote for Hillary Clinton," and then telling KID-AM radio in Idaho Falls "I will vote for the Republican ticket: Trump and (vice presidential nominee Mike) Pence."

Simpson - who faces the voters every two years - has never wavered.

That's called having a backbone. - M.T.