

Visit to Labrador's office draws complaint

Staff member in Lewiston office said he felt threatened during visit by group called LC Valley Indivisible

Chelsea Embree/Lewiston Tribune

A spokesman for U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador's office in Lewiston has filed a complaint alleging a threat from a group of local citizens who routinely visit congressional offices.

Scott Carlton reported the issue to the U.S. Capitol Police early last month. Carlton, who works out of the congressman's downtown Lewiston office, declined to comment when contacted by the Tribune and referred all questions to Doug Taylor, Labrador's spokesman in Meridian, Idaho.

The citizen group, LC Valley Indivisible, is comprised of mostly older residents of the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley, according to its members. The organization is loosely affiliated with the national Indivisible groups that call for town hall meetings with members of Congress to raise issues regarding President Donald Trump's administration.

LC Valley Indivisible members have visited the offices of Labrador and Sens. Mike Crapo and James Risch weekly. Staff with the senators' offices have not reported any issues with the group.

About half a dozen citizens met with Carlton briefly on Feb. 7 - their only interaction with anyone from Labrador's staff, according to members of the group. Lewiston residents Steve Carpenter and Jim Koreltz, both Indivisible members, said Carlton gave the group two minutes to speak, as Carlton said he was headed elsewhere for a meeting.

"We got to say our piece," Koreltz said. "... We were civil and kept it that way."

A woman read a prepared statement to Carlton, Carpenter said, and a few other group members made statements or asked questions.

"Then we were pretty much out of there," Carpenter said. "There was no other nasty exchanges or anything."

Carlton then reportedly attended a meeting of the Lewis Clark Valley Chamber of Commerce's Governmental Affairs Subcommittee, where he allegedly said an aggressive individual got in his face. Tim Barker, vice chairman of the subcommittee, confirmed that Carlton said he'd contacted the Capitol Police about the issue.

Taylor, in Meridian, said that's standard policy at all of Labrador's offices.

"We take things very seriously," he said. "When our staff are threatened, we follow office policy."

The Capitol Police, which has jurisdiction over all congressional offices nationwide, assesses and responds to any potential threat as needed. According to the agency's website, that response may include collaboration with other federal agencies and local law enforcement.

"Some of his concern and reasons why he went beyond locally is he didn't feel like the Lewiston Police Department was assisting how he wished they would have," Barker said.

Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny said Carlton reported his concerns but they were proven to be "unfounded."

"There was individuals there that were protesting in front of the offices there and making the employees feel uncomfortable," Ankeny said. "No crimes had been committed. They just felt uncomfortable based on some of the national attention that these protesters had raised."

Additional patrols of the area along the 300 block of D Street took place on Feb. 28 and March 7, Ankeny said, noting the Indivisible group usually makes their rounds between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Tuesdays.

"We haven't located anybody and there hasn't been a concern," Ankeny said, adding Lewiston police cannot take action unless a crime is committed.

"People have the right to protest as long as they're not committing a crime," he said.

The Indivisible group reported that Labrador's Lewiston office has been locked since their initial visit.

Labrador's office is open by appointment only, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., according to a staff member there. Taylor said Carlton's priorities are outreach and community involvement, meaning he's often out of the office.

Sometimes, Carlton is the only one there, Taylor said.

"That can be a bit (of a) precarious situation, to be alone and to have threatening people showing up in your office," Taylor said.

The Indivisible group continues to make weekly stops at the congressional offices, usually reading a prepared statement to Risch's and Crapo's staff. Spokespeople from the senators' offices have not reported any issues with the group.

"Overall, their calls and their visits in there have been cordial," said Kaylin Minton, communications director for Risch in Washington, D.C.

Lindsay Nothern, communications director for Crapo in Boise, said the group is "pretty civil."

"There's been no violence, even when people show up with opposing viewpoints," he said. "We have a good discussion."

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