

# In any showdown with Trump, Labrador wins

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## **Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

News flash to President Donald Trump: Idaho already knows 1st District Congressman Raul Labrador is better at blowing up legislative deals than passing them. It's no secret that Labrador is the Cruz director on the S.S. Dysfunction.

We need no presidential tweets on the subject.

Even before voters sent him to Washington, D.C., almost seven years ago, he was making a name for himself in the Idaho House for sidetracking Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's dreams for a transportation funding bill.

As a founder of the House Freedom Caucus, Labrador took pride in ousting House Speaker John Boehner, was central to the 2013 government shutdown and, most recently, was among the some three dozen conservatives who killed the package Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan hoped would repeal and replace Obamacare.

They wanted something even more draconian than the GOP plan that would deprive 24 million people of health insurance. Among them were 60,000 Idahoans who now receive subsidized private coverage.

Labrador did the right thing for the wrong reasons. In fact, he probably did more to secure Obamacare than his Democratic predecessor, former Idaho Congressman Walt Minnick, who voted against the health care reform package in 2009.

Truth be told, establishment Republicans were running for the hills. It was one thing to repeal Obamacare four dozen times when it was a political slogan masquerading as policy. Everyone knew President Obama's veto was in the wings. Now Republicans are in charge, so these votes have consequences.

Nevertheless, the presidential Twitter account went after Labrador and his colleagues: "The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team & fast. We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!"

Counter-tweeted Labrador: "Freedom Caucus stood with u when others ran. Remember who your real friends are. We're trying to help u succeed."

By the way, that's absolutely true. Last fall, when Trump got caught making sexist, lewd and vulgar comments during an "Access Hollywood" taping, Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, withdrew his endorsement and asked him to step down - although the state's senior senator later recanted. Second District Congressman Mike Simpson never backed off his assessment that Trump was "unfit" to be president.

Labrador remained true blue to Trump, even taking time away from his own re-election campaign to stump for the GOP nominee in Florida, Arizona and Utah.

And if you read the Idaho Republican's initial comment about Trumpcare, it wasn't "hell no." As much as Labrador did not like the measure, he seemed to offer himself as a liaison to the right wing: "President Trump signaled his willingness to negotiate. I'm eager to take him up on this offer."

Now Trump is signaling he will "fight" Labrador in the next election.

He might want to reconsider. This ain't Ronald Reagan intimidating local politicians with his sunny disposition and massive popularity with the GOP base. For starters, Labrador won his Idaho GOP

primary - in 2010 - with nearly 48 percent of the vote in a five-way race that featured an imploding establishment candidate, Vaughn Ward, who got 39 percent.

In the spring of 2016, Trump's Idaho primary campaign struggled to come up with 28 percent. Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz - Labrador's initial choice for the GOP nomination - carried Idaho with 45.4 percent.

And last fall, it wasn't Trump carrying local Republicans in Idaho; it was the complete reverse.

Trump won Idaho's four electoral votes with 59.2 percent - the weakest GOP victory since Bob Dole's 52.2 percent 20 years earlier.

By contrast, Labrador won his fourth term with 68.2 percent.

Keep this up, Mr. President, and he might win 70 percent next time out. - M.T.