

Voting no means never having to say you're sorry

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

No one will ever say of Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, what Conservative Americans for Limited Government President Bill Wilson unleashed on Washington Republican Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers Wednesday:

"Rep. McMorris Rodgers' vote is inexplicable and disappointing. Raising taxes on job creators into the teeth of this recession is a recipe for higher unemployment. This vote is sad, and may engender a primary challenge in 2014 - and Rep. McMorris Rodgers will have nobody to blame but herself."

The Washington Republican joined 84 GOP members of the House - including Idaho's Mike Simpson - and 172 House Democrats in rescuing the U.S. economy from the so-called fiscal cliff. She did it by supporting a bill that essentially raised taxes on families making more than \$450,000 a year but leaving in place the Bush-era tax rates for an estimated 98 percent of Washington taxpayers and 99 percent of those in Idaho.

The bill also puts off for a couple of months the sequestering of about \$110 billion in spending cuts divided between defense and discretionary programs.

In the Senate, it passed 89-8. Among those voting yes were Idaho Republicans Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and Washington Democrats Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray.

But Labrador wasn't among them. He voted no. So did another 150 House Republicans, but Labrador was the only GOP member from Idaho, Oregon or Washington to do so.

"This was a difficult vote, but as far as I am concerned, the Biden-McConnell deal is worse than no deal at all," he said. "The deal does nothing to address out-of-control spending and delays the only meaningful cuts Congress has been able to pass in the last two years."

Nobody's questioning Labrador's sincerity. If you're looking for reasons to vote against this bill, you can find them.

Of course, if you're a Republican, you could also justify voting yes. It locks into place what were supposed to be temporary Bush-era tax cuts for the middle class. Even Americans for Tax Reform's Grover Norquist gave GOP members cover for the vote: "They're not voting for a tax increase, they're voting to save tax cuts for as many people as they can over Obama's objections."

Just the same, Republicans such as McMorris Rodgers and Simpson will draw heat for voting yes on a must-pass bill.

They spared Labrador's constituents from a tax hike and an economic slowdown.

That makes Labrador's vote a win-win: Opposing the bill has no down side and it leaves his right-wing base unperturbed.

Nor is this the first time. After stalling to raise the nation's borrowing limit brought a downgrade in the U.S. government's credit rating and sent the already fragile economy into a slump, Republicans and Democrats raised the ceiling in 2011.

On the Washington side, McMorris Rodgers, Cantwell and Murray voted yes.

From Idaho, Simpson, Crapo and Risch also went along.

Labrador raised objections: "While this bill has the potential to reduce the size of our budget and the trajectory of government spending, this bill doesn't go far enough to make the changes necessary to get us out of our fiscal mess."

For Labrador, here was the safest political terrain. Others raised the debt ceiling so the economy didn't deteriorate further - and accepted the criticism.

Before spring is out, the economy again will be threatened by a new debt ceiling crunch, a new sequestration deadline and the expiration of a six-month federal spending blueprint - to say nothing of plans to reform the federal income tax code to bring in even more money.

Because a flawed solution beats the alternative of economic pain, Republicans and Democrats will have to cobble something together.

Would you care to guess what Labrador will do? - M.T.