

# Labrador's next career maneuver: Pick one

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Everybody has a theory about Idaho Republican Congressman Raul Labrador's next career move.

Does he take on Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter in next spring's GOP primary?

Is he angling for a Senate seat? There's even a theory that Labrador would run for a lower-tier statewide office - such as lieutenant governor - to establish a statewide launching pad.

Is Labrador going to seek a third term and make his mark in the U.S House?

And then there's this: Is Labrador going to follow in the footsteps of former U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint, R- S.C., who left office for a lucrative job running the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, or former Congressman Chris Chocola, R-Indiana, who now heads up the conservative Club for Growth?

Chocola's group, incidentally, has targeted Labrador's colleague, Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson, for termination.

If Labrador is eyeing a statewide race, why has he twice voted to gut the Idaho National Laboratory's key source of research funding? Last summer and again last week, Labrador supported halving the national energy research budget. Do that, and the INL's work force sheds thousands of jobs - and its overall viability becomes threatened.

Labrador was on the losing side. The budget passed intact. But it's hardly the kind of move a prospective governor wants on his record when courting eastern Idaho's support.

Among the signs pointing to Labrador seeking a third term is the \$277,271 balance in his re-election account. But as the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey reported, Labrador hasn't raised much money - just \$69,123 - in the second quarter. Much of it has come from Otter supporters.

If Labrador's focus is upon serving his constituents, how does he explain last year's vote against Secure Rural Schools and Payment in Lieu of Taxes - two programs worth \$10 million to Idaho County alone?

Plus most politicians planning a career in the House would not get caught up in an unsuccessful coup against Speaker John Boehner.

Nor would they abandon their best opportunity for a political and legislative legacy.

Given his Puerto Rican heritage, his experience as an immigration attorney and his status as a Tea Party darling, Labrador has the credentials to help the GOP pass comprehensive immigration reform and begin recovering political support from the Hispanic community.

But he bailed out of the bipartisan House "gang of eight" working on the issue and has positioned himself as an opponent of the Senate's reform bill.

All of which suggests Labrador will be on the sidelines if the GOP House ever digs itself out of the immigration hole.

Why bail? Idaho business and agricultural interests want the nation's broken immigration system fixed. If there's opposition to immigration in Labrador's district, it's diffused and disorganized.

But opposing immigration reform fits a pattern of Labrador burnishing his credentials with conservative groups. On must-pass legislation such as raising the debt ceiling or avoiding the fiscal cliff, Labrador has voted no, while many of his colleagues have swallowed hard and have gone along.

For the Idaho Republican, that translates into a near perfect scorecard among conservative voting indexes, such as:

- Club for Growth gives him a 98 percent approval, tying him for the second most conservative in the House. By contrast, Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers is pegged at 70 percent, while Simpson comes in at 66 percent.
- The American Conservative Union rates Labrador at 96 percent; McMorris Rodgers is at 84 percent; and Simpson is at 85 percent.
- The John Birch Society says Labrador voted its way 89 percent of the time, compared to 63 percent for McMorris Rodgers and 69 percent for Simpson.
- The Koch brothers' Americans for Prosperity gives Labrador 100 percent. McMorris Rodgers, AFP says, voted right only 88 percent of the time and it gave Simpson a 59 percent.

Throw in Labrador's enthusiasm for national media attention - and its obvious affection for his ability to perform well on live television. Labrador has been on "Meet the Press" so often it's become routine. You'll also find him on "This Week" and MSNBC's "WOW."

In the political trade, that's known as building a national brand - which can be parlayed into a rewarding contract with a conservative lobby.

Is that what Labrador is up to? If so, where do his Idaho constituents fit into the picture? -M.T.