

What gave you the idea Idaho is a democracy?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Like the people who rallied in Moscow Thursday, you may harbor an expectation that your elected representatives in Washington, D.C., should come home and listen to you.

You may want to ask Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, about what repealing Obamacare would do to a state where one in five people lacked health insurance before that act became law. Now it's down to at least 11 percent - and that's in spite of the Idaho Legislature's refusal to extend Medicaid coverage to another 87,000 low-income adults.

You could press Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, about how farmers are supposed to survive if President Trump deports their undocumented workforce and undermines their overseas markets by unraveling trade deals.

You might even get Idaho's man on the Intelligence and Foreign Affairs committees, Republican Sen. Jim Risch, to weigh in on the Kremlin's meddling in our last presidential election.

After all, many of their Republican colleagues across the country - Utah Rep. Jason Chaffetz, Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton and South Carolina Rep. Mark Sanford among them - have endured the renewed thunder on the left.

Well, wake up.

Where do you think you live?

In a democracy?

This is Idaho, for Pete's sake.

When was the last time you saw Risch at a town hall meeting?

That's right.

You haven't.

As the Idaho Statesman's Bill Dentzer and Cynthia Sewell noted, Risch has not engaged in any face-to-face town halls since he entered the Senate in 2009. He's held 10 tele-town meetings, but none since 2013. In fact, he'd rather lock the doors of his downtown Boise office. (And the last time north central Idaho saw him at the 2015 Lochsa land swap hearing in Grangeville, Risch brought along plenty of security.)

True, Crapo got so town hall happy he went to every place in the state - and held 200 of them - from October 2014 to September of last year. Of course, that coincided with the run-up to Crapo's successful re-election campaign.

Labrador held his last town hall meeting in 2015 - although he had time to make an unannounced appearance to the overwhelmingly Republican Idaho House of Representatives last week.

Meanwhile, the people of Idaho's 2nd Congressional District have not seen Rep. Mike Simpson convene a town hall meeting since 2004.

It's not as if they pay a price for ignoring you.

Two years ago, Risch creamed his Democratic opponent, Nels Mitchell, with 65 percent of the vote.

Last fall, Crapo won 66 percent of the vote against Democrat Jerry Sturgill.

Labrador did even better, with 68 percent against his Democratic opponent, James Piotrowski. Simpson carried 63 percent against Democrat Jennifer Martinez.

The reason is simple: They had the "R" behind their names. Once a candidate wins the Republican nomination in the spring primary, he's virtually assured of election. In fact, the closest call Simpson ever had was when the hard-right "primaried" him in 2014 - and he came through with nearly 62 percent of the vote.

Idahoans can't get past party labels - they're slavish toward Republicans and repulsed by the Democratic brand.

And part of it is because they never get the chance. The Democratic message is virtually drowned out because Idaho's GOP incumbents are so adroit at vacuuming up campaign checks.

Two years ago, Risch outspent Mitchell \$2.9 million to \$343,686.

Last year, Sturgill had only \$491,243 to counter Crapo's \$5.9 million.

Labrador had \$491,520 compared to Piotrowski's \$309,983 .

And while Simpson compiled a \$1 million campaign war chest, Martinez raised a mere \$19,702.

Do you really think Idaho's congressmen and senators are going to let a few people who are rattled by Trump or perturbed at being ignored get under their skins?

Why would they?

As long as they keep the Republican base happy, these four are assured a long, happy life inside the Washington, D.C., beltway - regardless of what a group of disgruntled constituents happen to think. - M.T.