

What's scarier than a bunch of Lewiston seniors?

Marty Trilhaase/Lewiston Tribune

When members of LC Valley Indivisible walked into Congressman Raul Labrador's Lewiston office, field staffer Scott Carlton started shaking in his shoes.

Carlton apparently got so unnerved by the Feb. 7 encounter that he dialed up the U.S. Capitol Police and asked them to look into it - something that Deputy Chief of Staff Doug Taylor of Meridian justified to the Tribune's Chelsea Embree.

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

Threatened?

Did the members of LC Valley Indivisible ride up to the congressional field office on a bunch of Harley-Davidson motorcycles?

No.

Apparently they walked into the office without an appointment.

They delivered a message: These citizen activists aren't thrilled with the way President Donald Trump and Labrador's Republican colleagues in Congress are proceeding. So, for a couple of minutes, they made Carlton listen to a prepared statement about investigating Russian interference in the American election, stopping Education Secretary Betsy DeVos from being confirmed to her job and health care.

Hardly the stuff of rhetorical bomb-throwing.

As a matter of fact, the Lewiston-based staffers working for Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch continue to meet with these folks about once a week - while Labrador's office has remained secured behind locked doors ever since.

And just how imposing are these LC Valley Indivisible members?

They include:

- 86-year-old Colleen Mahoney of Lewiston, who never threw a punch in her life.
- 64-year-old retiree Jim Koreltz and his wife, 63-year-old Gwen.
- Steve Carpenter of Lewiston, who is 53, and his wife, Nikki, who is 52.
- Clarkston Democrat Janet Marugg, who also is in her 50s.

The youngster of the bunch was 37-year-old Amy Canfield, a Lewis-Clark State College faculty member, who read a prepared statement to Carlton - all 5-feet, 4-inches of her. Full disclosure: Canfield is the wife of Tribune reporter Joel Mills.

If you were looking for the most imposing person in the room, your eye would go toward Carlton, who was taller and bigger than any of his guests.

Size isn't everything. Maybe they proceeded in a menacing manner.

Not according to Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny - who, during last summer's "Black Lives Matter, Too" rally had no difficulty discouraging the exercise of free speech in preference to maintaining security.

Said Ankeny: Carlton's concerns were "unfounded."

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

Engaging with the people of Lewiston is part of Carlton's job. If the congressional staffer is not willing to do that, why doesn't Labrador close this office and do north central Idaho's casework long-distance from Meridian and Washington, D.C.?

Besides, Carlton should consider how the shoe was on the other foot seven or eight years ago.

At the time, Democrat Walt Minnick held the 1st Congressional District office and his Lewiston staff was responding to Tea Party protesters - again, many of them senior citizens - who didn't like then-President Obama's economic stimulus and health care reform package.

Nobody called the Capitol Police on them.

So is it a security issue only when left-of-center activists challenge a Republican member of Congress? Has Labrador's staff grown fearful of the masses?

Or have years of easy re-election campaigns in a one-party state left them with an overdeveloped sense of entitlement?

Either way, it's hardly the kind of attitude you'd expect from a politician who is reportedly going to ask Idahoans for a promotion.

If Labrador does indeed enter what is an increasingly crowded field of gubernatorial candidates, he - and the people who work on his behalf - will have to engage all kinds of voters, not run away from them. - M.T.