

Labrador can keep his day job and run for governor

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

If Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, wants to spend the remaining 19 months of his term running for governor, he shouldn't do it on the taxpayer's dime.

So says the Democratic leader in the Idaho House, Rep. Mat Erpelding of Boise.

"By running for one office while holding another, Congressman Labrador is shirking his duties to the people who elected him while asking them to pay for his campaign," Erpelding says.

As far as campaign stunts go, this one is fairly clever.

It labels Labrador a hypocrite.

After all, isn't he the fellow who routinely harps against the Washington, D.C., political establishment? Yet, when it serves his ambitions, Labrador acts every bit the establishment politician.

But he's under no legal obligation to step aside and forfeit his \$174,000-a-year salary. As the Associated Press' Kimberlee Kruesi has pointed out, only five states - Georgia, Florida, Arizona, Hawaii and Texas - have resign-to-run laws.

Of course, were Labrador to deploy his taxpayer-supported congressional office resources and staff to subsidize his campaign, he'd be flouting the law. But he knows better than that. After all, one of his aides blew the congressional ethics whistle on Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., for doing the same thing.

Nor is there any ethical reason for the four-term congressman to prematurely leave Washington, D.C., behind.

Not enough time to continue working at this day job in Congress while campaigning full-time for governor?

Who are you kidding?

Have you examined this year's congressional calendar?

Congress was in session just eight days in April. This month, the House will work 12 days. For the entire summer, Labrador will be expected to spend 31 days in Washington - which includes zero in August.

In all, members of the House will devote 145 days this year to Washington, D.C. In case you're keeping score, that's about 100 fewer days than the average 40-hour-a-week worker puts in at his job.

Even for someone whose congressional intentions involve more than showing up and routinely taping his thumb to the "no" button, there remains plenty of time for an extracurricular political campaign.

What about the unfair advantage this hands Labrador?

Oh, please. Get over it. If the shoe were on the other foot, what would

Erpelding's Democrats say?

Nothing.

Idaho Democratic Gov. John Evans spent the better part of two years leading up to the 1986 election campaigning for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Steve Symms.

Then in 1992, Democrat Richard Stallings, who held Idaho's 2nd Congressional District seat, ran for the U.S. Senate against Republican Dirk Kempthorne.

Nobody at the time suggested either one of them step aside.

Nor should they.

Who gets hurt by resign-to-run laws?

The voters, for one. Their choices would be immediately constrained to local politicians and millionaires.

Obviously it would bar Labrador - an elected official of modest personal means - from seeking political advancement. On the other hand, it would work no hardship on Labrador's rivals for the GOP nomination - including Lt. Gov. Brad Little and Boise developer Tommy Ahlquist, who are wealthy, and former state Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian, who can travel more easily within the state. (Although Little also is running as an incumbent, Erpelding is leaving him alone.)

Labrador's constituents, for another. A vacancy in the U.S. House is like no other. It cannot be filled by appointment. Only the voters can elect a new congressman.

Doing so can take months.

Remember when Washington Gov. Jay Inslee abandoned his congressional seat in 2012 to run for his current job full time? His congressional district constituents remained without representation for the better part of the year.

Presumably Erpelding knows all this.

Nice try. But no cigar. - M.T.