

# Top Idaho GOP candidates square off in debate



Dave Leroy, former attorney general and former lieutenant governor, at microphone, gives his opening remarks during the first televised GOP debate for Idaho's open 1st Congressional District seat in Meridian, Idaho, Saturday, April 14, 2018. Leroy debated against four other Republican opponents. (AP Photo/Kimberlee Kruesi)

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BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Republican Idaho gubernatorial candidate Raul Labrador lobbed familiar criticisms against his opponents Tommy Ahlquist and Brad Little in an otherwise tame town hall debate on Saturday that focused heavily on tax policy and jobs.

Labrador, a four-term congressman, repeatedly argued he was the only candidate with integrity.

"I've talked to the people of Idaho, what they're looking for is a conservative governor with integrity," Labrador said during his opening remarks. "It's really easy to stand up here and say you're going to do certain things. The hard thing is to actually follow through."

Labrador has faced a spike in attack ads targeting everything from Labrador's congressional record to missed votes to his support of President Donald Trump.

The ads have largely been funded by a political action committee that supports Ahlquist, a Boise businessman running for political office for the first time. Labrador has previously called the attacks "shameful."

"Tommy has flipped-flopped about 10 times in this campaign because he believes he can tell you what you want to hear instead of telling you what he believes," Labrador said. "I have always told you what I believed."

Ahlquist responded by calling Labrador a career politician.

"Professional politicians like talking about stabilizing the economy and taxes, but I come from that real world," Ahlquist said. "We need to increase our wages, which would require a future different from our past."

Ahlquist's campaign has described the first-time candidate as a political outsider, similar to Trump.

Little, the state's three-term lieutenant governor who is close with outgoing Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, said he was the best candidate to lead the Gem State as it attracts more people and companies.

"Something must be working or Idaho wouldn't be the fastest growing state in the country," Little said, going on to defend the state's current tax incentive programs for businesses.

Labrador said he opposed the state government picking "winners and losers," and said taxpayers shouldn't have to pick up the tab in order to secure new jobs.

All three candidates agreed, however, that the current sales tax on groceries should be repealed and all of the candidates reiterated their support of the Second Amendment when asked about gun violence in schools. Labrador came out in support of arming teachers, while Ahlquist said school facilities should be more secure and Little said that Idaho schools already have the option to arm their teachers if they want to but the state shouldn't mandate teachers to do so.

Labrador and Ahlquist came out in support legalizing cannabidiol, otherwise known as CBD oil that contains little or no THC, because supporters say the product can help treat some medical issues. Little said the product must be thoroughly regulated and pointed to the state's existing CBD "compassionate use"

program that allows a limited number of families with sick kids to enroll the children to receive the product in a safe environment.

Following the gubernatorial debate, five Republican candidates vying for the open 1st Congressional District seat also faced off in a debate.

Participants included Dave Leroy, former lieutenant governor and former attorney general; Luke Malek, an attorney and current state representative; Christy Perry, also a current state representative and gun store owner; Russ Fulcher, a former state senator and former gubernatorial candidate; and Michael Snyder, an author and former attorney known as an end-times enthusiast and first-time political candidate.

All of the candidates mostly agreed in their support of Trump and his administration's efforts to appoint more conservative judges, as well as approved of Trump's effort to build a wall along the country's southern border.

Snyder was the most bombastic candidate during the 90-minute debate by loudly and animatedly yelling at his opponents for not being conservative enough, while also promising to work to dissolve the Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Education and federal income tax.

"If you want someone to work with the Democrats, great, but if you want someone with a backbone vote for me," Snyder said.

In turn, many of the candidates said they understood Snyder's anger but said they could work inside the system to get fewer regulations and more job opportunities for Idahoans.

"Sometimes you must reach across the aisle," Leroy said. "At the end of the day we must govern, we can't be deadlocked."

The debates were hosted by KBOI-TV and 670 KBOI in Meridian.