

The LEWISTON TRIBUNE



May 5, 2017

CHEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. He continues to wade into potentially unruly town hall meetings. This morning, the four-term congressman is set to appear at Lewis-Clark State College's Silverthorne Theater. Later, he'll be at Lake City High School in Coeur d'Alene.

That's a follow-up to Labrador's town hall meetings last month in Meridian and Nampa.

But north central Idaho could deliver more turbulence. For instance, Latah County came within two votes of rejecting him last year. And Labrador can expect to answer for his Lewiston field representative, Scott Carlton, who earlier this year sicced the U.S. Capitol Police on a group of LC Valley Indivisible members who sought to meet with him.

Labrador's timing also guarantees a rough-and-tumble session, coming just hours after he voted for his party's American Health Care Act alternative to Obamacare.

Here's betting the Idaho Republican will get his share of hostile comments from the very people - older, poorer and with pre-existing medical conditions - who believe they've been injured by his decision.

Labrador's willingness to hold himself accountable to the public stands in stark contrast to his Idaho colleagues.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, hasn't engaged in any town hall meetings since he entered the Senate eight years ago.

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, capped a series of town hall meetings last year. But he was running for re-election and the political winds have shifted since Donald Trump won the White House.

The last time Congressman Mike Simpson held a face-to-face town hall, George W. Bush was running for a second term.

So give Labrador points for audacity.

JEERS ... to Labrador, Risch and Crapo. They voted against a \$1.1 trillion spending bill that keeps the government open through the end of September.

So it was left to responsible Republicans - such as Washington's Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Idaho's Simpson - to head off another government shutdown. The last time that happened, in 2013, it cost \$24 billion and shaved 0.6 percent off the year's economic growth.

What if the 102 House Republicans who voted with Labrador as well as the 16 members of the Senate who joined with Crapo and Risch had their way?

Here's just one example: Rural Idaho counties would be in even worse shape.

Defeat of this measure would have blocked about \$21 million in Payment in Lieu of Taxes for Idaho counties. That works out to:

- \$1.64 million to Idaho County - which has already lost \$6.25 million with the demise of Secure Rural Schools.
- \$681,002 to Clearwater County - on top of the \$1.1 million in SRS money it has forfeited.
- Nearly \$264,000 to Latah County, \$80,876 to Nez Perce County and \$7,994 to Lewis County.

Says Risch: "While there were many individual provisions I opposed, and many I supported and was glad to see included, I could not in good conscience vote for an overall increase in spending."

Says Crapo: "While the bill passed by Congress today does contain good policy measures, ... it does not go far enough to address our nation's fiscal health."

Translation: Vote no - and take the dough.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. Idaho's chief executive was at his best Monday when he carried a personal message to 107 cadets attending the Idaho Youth Challenge Academy in Pierce:

Everyone is a work in progress. You make mistakes. But through hard work and diligence, anything is possible. Even someday becoming governor.

One of Otter's pet projects, the Pierce-based academy offers a reboot for about 200 of the 5,000 young Idahoans who drop out of high school each year.

That's something Otter knows about.

"I left school at 16 and wanted to join the Navy," he told the cadets. "I thought I was smarter than all eight of my brothers and sisters and my mom and dad."

A year of hard work and crummy pay at a dairy farm dissuaded young Mr. Otter of that notion. From there began a path that continued on to college, extended into business and then politics.

As he went from class to class, the governor didn't merely talk to the cadets; he related to them. He volunteered insights into the Constitution. Or why Idaho has a narrow northern panhandle. He also shared an apparent fascination with computers. And he inspired.

"In five and a half weeks, you'll be through," Otter volunteered. "No, you'll be beginning."

CChEERS ... to Amy Lientz, class of 1985, Orofino High School. Manager of outreach programs for the Idaho National Laboratory at Idaho Falls, Lientz offered a helping hand to her old stomping grounds.

Last week, Battelle Energy Alliance - the INL's lead contractor - provided Youth Academy cadets a glimpse into the possibilities awaiting them in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) careers.

Lientz oversees that INL outreach program.

This is more than just a group of engineers and scientists exposing students attending classes in an isolated corner of northern Idaho to a high-tech future.

It's part of addressing a genuine challenge.

Within eight years, Idaho's economy will produce 63,000 more STEM jobs than it can fill - unless it educates more of its own homegrown talent, lures more people from out of state or exports its high-tech industries elsewhere.

JEERS ... to Washington Rep. McMorris Rodgers. Talk about grandstanding on the future of the dams along the Snake and Columbia rivers.

Why, for instance, would she ask four high-ranking officials - Army Secretary Robert Speer, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Bonneville Power Administration head Elliot Mainzer - about the effects of a federal judge's order to increase spill to help endangered salmon and steelhead?

That information is already available. All McMorris Rodgers needs to do is unwrap reports issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the BPA and the Bureau of Reclamation. Or she could look over court filings issued in the case during past decade or so.

Why not seek information from more objective outlets? How about the Northwest Power and Conservation Council? Or, for that matter, she could turn to the Congressional Research Service or the Government Accountability Office.

Doesn't this look like asking loaded questions from biased sources? - M.T.