

# IMPulse

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**The Spokesman-Review**  
Spokane, Washington  
**Saturday May 6, 2017**  
by **Kip Hill**  
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## Health care dominates at CdA town hall

### *Rep. Raul Labrador defends vote for GOP bill to crowd*

Facing a largely skeptical crowd, Rep. Raul Labrador defended his vote for the Republican health care bill Friday evening at a town hall meeting that packed the 500-capacity Lake City High School auditorium in Coeur d'Alene.

"We want to help all Americans, not just a small group of Americans," Labrador said, echoing a refrain from another town hall in North Idaho earlier Friday, a day after the House of Representatives narrowly approved a bill replacing key provisions of the Affordable Care Act. "What our bill did, was it created a process that will reduce the health insurance costs for a majority of Americans."

Over the course of nearly two hours, more than a dozen people took to the microphone to condemn the Republican bill.

Some argued that it removed guarantees for people with pre-existing conditions by leaving decisions about coverage up to states, which could opt out of protections guaranteed by the Affordable Care Act and price other vulnerable populations out of affordable insurance.

When Labrador spoke, reiterating his position that health care is not a right guaranteed in the Constitution, the crowd raised red construction paper cards with the word "immoral" written in black lettering. Some booed.

Coeur d'Alene resident Rebecca Schroeder, the mother of a 9-year-old with cystic fibrosis, handed out photocopied sheets of statements by organizations such as the American Medical Association and the American Cancer Society, all of which condemned the Republican bill. At the microphone, she accused Labrador of pushing a bill that would restrict her son's access to lifesaving medications.

"Are you asking us to disregard the voices of patients and health care professionals?" Schroeder asked.

"You and I disagree on this," Labrador said, after several members of the audience stood and applauded Schroeder's comments. "I told you that I wanted to protect people like your son, while also protecting the 93 percent of Americans that have been harmed by Obamacare."

Labrador repeated several times during the town hall that the benefits of the Affordable Care Act go to a small portion of the population, while the majority is left with rising premiums. The congressman reiterated to several attendees, including 34-year-old Teuvo Orjala, that health care was not a right protected in the U.S. Constitution, and therefore lawmakers were under no legal obligation to provide it.

"I do think we have a responsibility, not a Constitutional right, but a responsibility to take care of people who cannot take care of themselves," Labrador said.

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Orjala, who is allied with the Indivisible Idaho movement that opposes the agenda of President Donald Trump, asked Labrador how that position reconciled with his Christian faith, which the lawmaker has been vocal about in his public life.

Labrador said he grew up poor, and when his family needed something, “we didn’t go to the government. We went to the church, and the church provided the things that we needed for a month or two.”

Orjala said after the town hall he was disappointed with Labrador’s answer.

“I was hoping for a heartfelt answer, and I felt like I kind of got a canned answer,” he said.

Labrador pushed back on claims that he should urge Trump to release his tax returns, a request that has lingered from last year’s campaign. The congressman said that neither the Constitution nor the law requires a president to turn over his returns, but only to release a financial statement, which Trump did.

He also dismissed calls for Congress to involve itself in investigations regarding the Trump administration’s ties to Russia, saying there hadn’t been any evidence of illegal activity.

Almost everyone who walked up to the microphone applauded Labrador for holding a town hall meeting in his district. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers has faced criticism across state lines for not holding an in-person meeting with constituents during the past several Congressional recesses.

“I have to admit to you, this isn’t the funnest thing that I’ve ever done, getting yelled at by a bunch of people,” Labrador said. “But this is my job, and my job is to have this discussion and this debate with you.”

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