

## **Senator denies he's gay after soliciting sex in men's room**

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Idaho's Craig joins growing list of Republicans facing troubles

Under fire from leaders of his own party, a Republican senator who had been accused of lewd conduct in a men's room declared Tuesday, "I am not gay" and said the only thing he did wrong was plead guilty to a criminal charge.

"I am not gay. I never have been gay," Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, 62, said at a news conference Tuesday, Aug. 28, in Boise with his wife, Suzanne, at his side. "I did nothing wrong at the Minneapolis airport."

Craig's defiant news conference came as Senate Republican leaders in Washington called for an ethics committee review into his involvement in a police sting operation this summer in the airport men's room.

His is the latest in a series of scandals involving Republicans that threaten to further tarnish the party's reputation. Craig joins other GOP senators facing ethical and legal troubles.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, is under scrutiny for his relationship with a contractor who helped oversee a renovation project that more than doubled the size of the senator's home. And Sen. David Vitter, R-La., acknowledged that his phone number appeared in records of a Washington-area business that prosecutors have said was a front for prostitution.

Another Republican officeholder, Florida State Rep. Bob Allen, is set to go to trial on Sept. 19 on charges he solicited an undercover police officer for sex in a public restroom in Titusville, Fla. Allen caused an uproar when, while trying to explain his actions, he said he offered to perform oral sex on the officer, who is African-American, because he was intimidated by the "stocky black guy" and was afraid he was going to be robbed.

Polls showed that ethical lapses by Republicans played a role in allowing Democrats to win control of Congress during last year's legislative elections. Among those lapses were former U.S. Rep. Mark Foley's sexually explicit e-mails to underage male congressional pages.

Jasper LiCalzi, a political science professor at Albertson College of Idaho in Caldwell, Idaho, said the GOP is likely to still be skittish after the situation with Foley, and that skittishness could spill over onto Craig.

"There's a chance that he'll resign over this," LiCalzi said. "With the pressure on the Republican Party, he could be pressured to resign. If they think this is going to be something that's the same as Mark Foley — the sort of 'drip, drip, drip, there's more information that's going to come out' — they may try to push him out."

Sen. Mitch McConnell and other top Republican lawmakers said in a written statement this week that Republican leadership “is examining other aspects of the case to see if additional action is required.”

Earlier, the private group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics filed a complaint with the ethics committee seeking an investigation into whether Craig violated Senate rules by engaging in disorderly conduct.

The LGBT group Log Cabin Republicans has also called for Craig to step down. Patrick Sammon, the Log Cabin president, issued a statement on Tuesday, Aug. 28, questioning Craig’s “ability to continue serving.”

“He has violated the public trust, not just with his inappropriate and illegal behavior, but in the subsequent explanation of his actions,” Sammon said. “Innocent people don’t plead guilty. The time to contest these allegations would’ve been before his guilty plea.”

Sammon said Craig “owes the people of Idaho a more credible explanation” than the one he has given, and criticized the lawmaker for “questioning the honesty of law enforcement officers.”

But U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, an openly gay Democrat from Massachusetts, told the Associated Press this week that while Craig may be a hypocrite, he does not think the Idaho Republican should resign.

“What he did, it’s hypocritical, but it’s not an abuse of his office in the sense that he was taking money for corrupt votes,” Frank said. “I think people should resign when they have clearly done the job in a way that is dishonest.”

Added Frank: “It’s one thing to say that someone can’t be trusted to vote without being corrupt, it’s another to say that he can’t be trusted to go to the bathroom by himself.”

Frank himself was reprimanded by the House Ethics Committee when it was discovered that a man he had been in a relationship with ran a male escort service out of Frank’s D.C. home without Frank’s knowledge.

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force expanded the charges of hypocrisy to the whole Republican Party, criticizing Republican leaders for treating Craig so differently from the way they responded after reports of Vitter’s association with Washington, D.C. prostitution service.**

**Vitter reportedly received “thunderous applause” from Senate GOP colleagues during a policy lunch held a few days after his admission.**

**In a statement released Wednesday, Aug. 29, NGLTF executive director Matt Foreman said: “Let’s see — one Republican senator is involved in soliciting sex from a man and the Republican leadership calls for a Senate investigation and yanks the rug from underneath him. Another Republican senator admits to soliciting the services of a female prostitute and there’s not only no investigation but the senator is greeted with a standing ovation by his Republican peers. What explains the starkly different responses? I’d say rank and homophobic hypocrisy.”**

Craig entered his plea several weeks after an undercover police officer in the Minneapolis arrested him and issued a complaint that said the three-term senator had engaged in actions “often used by persons communicating a desire to engage in sexual conduct.”

The airport incident occurred June 11. Craig signed his plea papers on Aug. 1, and word of the

events surfaced Monday, Aug. 27. The senator issued a statement Monday night that said, "In hindsight, I should have pled not guilty."

He repeated that assertion at the Idaho news conference. "In June, I overreacted and made a poor decision," he said. "I chose to plead guilty to a lesser charge in hopes of making it go away."

At his news conference, Craig was at times defiant, at others apologetic.

"Please let me apologize to my family, friends and staff and fellow Idahoans for the cloud placed over Idaho," he said. "I did nothing wrong at the Minneapolis airport. I did nothing wrong, and I regret the decision to plead guilty and the sadness that decision has brought on my wife, on my family, friends, staff and fellow Idahoans."

Craig said he has hired a lawyer and will ask him to review the case.

The conservative three-term senator, who has represented Idaho in Congress for more than a quarter-century, is up for re-election next year. He said he would announce next month whether he would run again.

Craig, who has voted against gay marriage and opposes extending special protections to gay and lesbian crime victims and who reportedly sent a letter to a constituent defending the military's anti-gay "Don't ask, don't tell" policy after pleading guilty to the disorderly conduct charge, has faced rumors about his sexuality since the 1980s.

Mike Rogers, who bills himself as a gay activist blogger, published the allegations on his Web site, <http://www.blogactive.com>, in October 2006. Craig at the time called the allegations ridiculous.

Rogers' blog also prompted an investigation by The Idaho Statesman, which in May asked the senator about the allegations. The newspaper did not publish a story on the allegations at that time, because although they deemed at least one witness to be credible, they did not believe they had enough concrete evidence to substantiate the claims, Statesman political writer Dan Popkey told NPR on Tuesday, Aug. 28.

That same day, however, the Statesman did publish a story by Popkey about Craig's arrest that recapped the previous allegations and newspaper's investigation.

Popkey's story this week said the "most serious finding" in the Statesman's investigation "was the report by a professional man with close ties to Republican officials" who "reported having oral sex with Craig at Washington's Union Station, probably in 2004."

Popkey's story noted that the Statesman "also spoke with a man who said Craig made a sexual advance toward him at the University of Idaho in 1967 and a man who said Craig 'cruised' him for sex in 1994 at the REI store in Boise," but that dozens of other allegations "proved untrue, unclear or unverifiable."

Craig has denied all the assertions, and on Tuesday criticized the newspaper for harassing him and his family.

The scandal had already taken a political toll. On Monday, Craig resigned from a prominent role with Republican Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. He had been one of Romney's top Senate supporters, serving as a liaison for the campaign since February.

Asked about Craig, Romney said, "He's disappointed the American people."

“Yeah, I think it reminds us of Mark Foley and Bill Clinton. I think it reminds us of the fact that people who are elected to public office continue to disappoint, and they somehow think that if they vote the right way on issues of significance or they can speak a good game, that we’ll just forgive and forget,” Romney said on CNBC’s “Kudlow & Company.”

According to a Hennepin County, Minn., court docket, Craig pleaded guilty to a disorderly conduct charge Aug. 8, with the court dismissing a charge of gross misdemeanor interference to privacy.

The court docket said Craig paid \$575 in fines and fees and was put on unsupervised probation for a year. A sentence of 10 days in the county workhouse was stayed.

According to the prosecutor’s complaint, obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, airport police Sgt. Dave Karsnia, who was investigating allegations of sexual conduct in airport restrooms, went into a stall shortly after noon on June 11 and closed the door.

Minutes later, the officer saw Craig gazing into his stall through the crack between the stall door and the frame.

After a man in the adjacent stall left, Craig entered it and put his roller bag against the front of the stall door, “which Sgt. Karsnia’s experience has indicated is used to attempt to conceal sexual conduct by blocking the view from the front of the stall,” said the complaint dated June 25.

The complaint said Craig then tapped his right foot several times and moved it closer to Karsnia’s stall and then moved it to where it touched Karsnia’s foot. Karsnia recognized that “as a signal often used by persons communicating a desire to engage in sexual conduct,” the complaint said.

Craig then passed his left hand under the stall divider into Karsnia’s stall with his palms up and guided it along the divider toward the front of the stall three times, the complaint said.

The officer then showed his police identification under the divider and pointed toward the exit “at which time the defendant exclaimed ‘No!’” the complaint said.

The Aug. 8 police report says that Craig had handed the arresting officer a business card that identified him as a member of the Senate.

“What do you think about that?” Craig is alleged to have said, according to the report.

Craig, a rancher and a member of the National Rifle Association, lives in Eagle, Idaho, near the capital of Boise. He was a member of the House for 10 years before winning election to the Senate in 1990. He was re-elected in 1996 and 2002.