



## Arrest Clouds Idaho Senator's Future

August 28, 2007

Idaho Sen. Larry Craig, who has voted against gay marriage and opposes extending special protections to gay and lesbian crime victims, finds his political future in doubt after pleading guilty to misdemeanor charges stemming from complaints of lewd conduct in a men's room.

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 hasn't said if he will run for a fourth term in 2008 and was expected to announce his plans this fall.

A spokesman, Sidney Smith, was uncertain late Monday if Craig's guilty plea in connection with an incident at the Minneapolis airport would affect his re-election plans.

"It's too early to talk about anything about that," Smith said.

A political science professor in Idaho said Craig's political future was in jeopardy. And a spokesman for the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, Hannah August, said Craig's guilty plea "has given Americans another reason not to vote Republican" next year.

The married Craig, 62, has faced rumors about his sexuality since the 1980s, but allegations that he has engaged in gay sex have never been substantiated. Craig has denied the assertions, which he calls ridiculous.

The arrest changes that dynamic, said Jasper LiCalzi, a political science professor at Albertson College of Idaho in Caldwell, Idaho. He cited the House page scandal that drove Florida Rep. Mark Foley from office.

"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."

Already Craig has stepped down from a prominent role with Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. He had been one of Romney's top Senate supporters, serving as a Senate liaison for the campaign since February.

"He did not want to be a distraction and we accept his decision," said Matt Rhoades, a Romney campaign spokesman.

According to a Hennepin County, Minn., court docket, Craig pleaded guilty to a disorderly conduct charge on 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.

Roll Call, a Capitol Hill newspaper, which first reported the case, said on its Web site Monday that Craig was arrested June 11 by a plainclothes officer investigating complaints of lewd conduct in a men's restroom at the airport.

Minneapolis airport police declined to provide a copy of the arrest report after business hours Monday.

Roll Call, citing the report, said Sgt. Dave Karsnia made the arrest after an encounter in which he was seated in a stall next to a stall occupied by Craig. Karsnia described Craig tapping his foot, which Karsnia said he "recognized as a signal used by persons wishing to engage in lewd conduct."

Roll Call quoted the Aug. 8 police report as saying 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 said in a statement issued by his office Monday that he was not involved in any inappropriate conduct.

"At the time of this incident, I complained to the police that they were misconstruing my actions," he said. "I should have had the advice of counsel in resolving this matter. In hindsight, I should not have pled guilty. I was trying to handle this matter myself quickly and expeditiously."

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.

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.

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.

Last fall, Craig called allegations from a gay-rights activist that he's had homosexual relationships "completely ridiculous."

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

**Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, an advocacy group, on Monday called Craig a hypocrite.**

**"What's up with elected officials like Senator Craig? They stand for so-called family values and fight basic protections for gay people while furtively seeking other men for sex," Foreman said.**