

# Idaho's three million dollar man loses some

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

If Congressman Raul Labrador's re-election campaign lost a quarter of a million bucks, the Idaho Republican would be down to his last \$472.

For Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, misplacing \$250,000 would leave him \$183,509 in the hole.

Even U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho - one of the wealthiest people in Congress - would have only \$17,707 left in his campaign war chest if somebody walked away with \$250,000.

U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho?

He's rolling in cash.

So much in fact that when a young campaign staffer mishandled \$250,000, Crapo didn't notice for two years. Once he did, Crapo waited another three years before alerting the Federal Election Commission - and you.

Last week, Crapo's campaign acknowledged that a twentysomething at the helm of his 2010 re-election organization took \$250,000, invested the money with a friend and lost it.

The aide, Jake Ball, managed Crapo's 2010 re-election campaign. In that role, he placed the money with an Idaho-based company, Blueberry Guru LLC, on Sept. 22, 2008.

Blueberry Guru LLC was operated by a friend of Ball's, Gavin McCaleb.

From there, the money went to a Nevada-registered company called Pyramid Global Resources.

Ball expected an 8 percent return.

Instead, the money disappeared in the financial collapse of 2008-09.

Two years later, Crapo went on to win another term.

After that election, Ball moved to Labrador's staff, where he served as district director until he resigned at about the same time Crapo's financial goof was disclosed.

Sure, it's scandalous to leave a young person with unfettered access to such large sums of campaign cash. Crapo said he was between campaign treasurers at the time.

Only the most jaded would not get some heartburn watching politicians convert campaign loot into venture capital - although such practices are becoming more common.

And it's unsettling to wonder why Crapo waited to level with his contributors and the voters. Whether he took too long is a call the FEC will make.

Sort through Crapo's campaign finances, however, and the real outrage is right in front of you.

Here's a man who could be Idaho's senator for life.

In 2004, he ran virtually unopposed. Write-in candidate Scott McClure got less than 1 percent of the vote.

In 2010, Crapo raised more than \$5 million for his re-election campaign. His Democratic opponent, Tom Sullivan, coughed up a paltry \$93,490.

Crapo cruised to a 71.2 percent win.

Nobody else in Idaho's GOP-dominated politics puts so much energy into raising so much money.

Not Simpson, who in last year's campaign collected \$1.2 million.

Not Labrador, who gathered \$830,000 in 2012.

Not Risch, who topped out at \$3.1 million in 2008 running for an open seat against a former U.S. congressman, Larry LaRocco.

Not Idaho Gov. C.L.(Butch) Otter, who in 2010 spent about \$1.8 million.

Yet, Crapo gobbles up campaign checks like a man possessed. More than two years before he faces the voters again, Crapo has amassed a nest egg of \$3.35 million.

You can see why Crapo goes after campaign cash so ardently. It's called the money primary. Win it and it doesn't matter what your own party or even the voters think about the job you're doing. Your huge wad of cash scares off any potential rival.

But why would companies such as JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs and Amgen give so lavishly to someone who is flush already?

Crapo is perched on two key committees: Banking gives him a say over the financial services sector. And Finance gives him power over the tax loopholes sought after by corporate lobbyists.

Of course, in pursuing those committee assignments, Crapo has become the first senior Idaho senator in some time to decline a seat on the appropriations panel - something that would be more valuable to his constituents than Banking or Finance.

Let the FEC, the Senate and possibly law enforcement sort through who's responsible for these newly acknowledged transgressions.

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Just the same, you've already learned two things about Crapo: He takes more campaign cash than he needs. And he's getting sloppy with it. - M.T.

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