

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Three Strikes and

No holder of high public office in Idaho could have been happier to see 2013 end than U.S. Senator Mike Crapo, the senior member of the state's four-member, all Republican delegation.

Counting Christmas of 2012, in slightly more than 365 days the normally quiet workhorse (as opposed to a show horse) made the headlines on three occasions that can only be described as embarrassing and mortifying to a senator long known for his probity and sense of propriety.

First there was his arrest for driving while impaired in northern Virginia just before Christmas of 2012. Few reporters bought his story about deciding to go for a late night drive. The rumor mill churned into overdrive but the senator is justifiably held in such high regard that no one in the media chose to pursue speculation regarding where he may have been headed or where he was coming from.

His years of good conduct and solid, stolid work got him a "move along" card. Strike one, however.

A few months later another story hit the headlines regarding the mishandling of \$250,000 in campaign money that appeared to have been loaned to one of the Senator's campaign staffers. This brought a rebuke from the Federal Election Commission. Strike two.

And just a few weeks ago the Senator appeared on the Senate floor with what looked to most observers like a "shiner" below his right eye more commonly associated with a left hook. Why he chose to display the black eye, allegedly the result of a fall while moving furniture, instead of stopping by the Senate's television studio to have a little make-up applied to cover up the shiner, is a complete mystery.

The shiner led to the kind of jokes and one liners that no politician likes to be the butt of and no Idaho politician had been the recipient of since

former Senator Larry Craig's toe-tapping incident in one of the restrooms in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport. Strike three, Senator Crapo.

In baseball, three strikes and you're out of the game. The same should also prevail in the political arena. Unfortunately, that is not the case and when one comes to the Senate from the most Republican state in the nation, Senators Crapo and Risch can pretty much count on staying in the Senate as long as they wish including right up to their dying day.

There is just one answer left to the Idaho voters: pass an initiative limiting service in all the statewide offices and the federal offices to a maximum of 12 years. Thus, a U.S. Senator could only serve two 6-year terms, a member of the House could only serve six 2-year terms, and a governor could only serve three 4-year terms.

Something seems to happen to even the best of office-holders after 12 years. For lack of a better phrase it can be called the "been there, done that" syndrome. Yes, it is a form of arrogance but the person starts thinking he or she has seen it all, know it all and they stop listening.

Some start thinking they have Ronald Reagan's Teflon suit and the media can't touch them. They start minimizing contact with the press---let the press secretary handle the pesky questions. Others get lazy and suspend their town hall meetings in off-election years. They start coasting, rationalizing as Senator Risch did last year that because the Congress is grid-locked, nothing gets done, so just coast along and get some foreign travel in while marking time.

Idaho's previous mistake with term limits was that of being too broad a sweep and applying it to county and municipal offices as well as highway districts, school and cemetery boards. It's the prestigious offices that need limits, not these lesser offices or the State Legislature.

Senator Crapo should recognize the signs of battle fatigue and step aside when his third senate term is up in 2016. There really is life after the Senate. Overall, the Senator has built a solid if not spectacular record for himself. Given the troubling signs of late it appears he can only tarnish this solid record by further service.

Odds are if he does retire he won't go back to Idaho Falls and resume the practice of law ("They never go back to Pocatello" in the immortal words of former Oregon Senator Richard Neuberger). All Senator Crapo has to do, though, is look at the lucrative positions paying seven-figures that former colleagues like Steve Symms, Dirk Kempthorne and Judd Gregg are commanding. Forsaking further public service is easily salved.

Absent term limits, whether he will or won't, only he knows. Hopefully he will recognize he took three strikes in 2013.