



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 23, 2010

Feds Eyeing Rubio's Credit Cards

Marco Rubio, the former Florida Speaker of the House and the leading candidate in the Republican primary race for U.S. Senate, is among the subjects of a preliminary federal investigation into the use of Republican Party credit cards for personal expenses, the Miami Herald and the St. Petersburg Times reported yesterday.



The IRS is looking at the tax records of at least of at least three former holders of the state party's America Express cards — Rubio, former party chairman Jim Greer, and former executive party director Delmar Johnson — the papers reported. The probe grew out of criminal investigation involving the U.S. attorney's office in Tallahassee and the FBI, as well as the IRS, into the use of the cards by state party officials.

Rubio campaign advisor Todd Harris said Tuesday that the former lawmaker from Miami had not been contacted by any federal investigators.

"There is absolutely nothing to this," Harris told the *Herald*. "Anyone who is looking into it or investigating will quickly come to the same conclusion." But the *Herald* and the *Times* reported they had obtained credit card records showing that repairs to the family minivan, grocery bills, plane tickets for his wife, and numerous retail purchases were among the more than \$100,000 in charges that Rubio put on the party's credit card during his two years as Speaker of the House. He also charged the party for dozens of meals, despite receiving taxpayer subsidies for meals, the papers reported. Rubio said he reimbursed the party for \$16,000 in personal expenses and claimed the rest was related to party business. The minivan, he said, was damaged by a valet at a political function. But the IRS may be interested in determining if charges he put on the party's credit card should be counted as personal income for Rubio and subject to taxation.

Rubio earlier this year admitted having doubled-billed the party and the state for airplane flights from South Florida to Tallahassee, saying it was an accounting error. He said he would pay back the party \$3,000 for eight of the flights, but Harris said the campaign is waiting for the party officials to verify the number of flights and the exact amount owed. Rubio's primary opponent in the Senate race, Governor Charles Crist has tried to capitalize on the issue, charging, for example, in a Fox News debate last month: "Speaker Rubio views public service as way to enhance his personal enrichment. And that's just wrong."

But so far, the Crist campaign has continued to flounder, as the once popular governor has gone in the past year from a virtual shoo-in for the Senate nomination to one openly considering running as an independent. The latest Quinnipiac University poll shows Crist trailing Rubio by 23 points. Many trace the Governor's slide to early last year when he embraced the President's economic stimulus bill and



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literally embraced the President himself when Obama came to the state to trumpet the benefits to from the \$787 billion stimulus package. Since then anti-Obama sentiment has grown, along with opposition to the recently passed healthcare reform bill and record levels of federal spending. Rubio has used the image of Obama-Crist hug in Internet ads and fundraising letters, conveying the message that the Governor is too wedded to the Obama agenda to effectively oppose it in the Senate. Crist has defended his decision to accept the stimulus money as "the right thing" for Florida.

"Our economy was going off into the abyss," he said in an interview on MSNBC. "We needed the money."

No longer the underdog, Rubio has attracted the support of big-name Republicans like former GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin and a slew of past and present presidential hopefuls, including former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and ex-Governors Mike Huckabee of Arkansas and Mitt Romney of Massachusetts. South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint has also endorsed Rubio. Today, former Vice President Dick Cheney became the latest Republican star to board the Rubio bandwagon.

"Marco is exactly the kind of a strong conservative leader we need in Washington right now," Cheney said in a statement released by the Rubio campaign. "We can trust Marco to stand up to the Obama agenda that threatens our freedom, and promote clear conservative alternatives."

As for Crist, the ex-Veep all but read the Governor out of the Grand Old Party. "Charlie Crist has shown time and again that he cannot be trusted in Washington to take on the Obama agenda because on issue after issue he actually supports that agenda," Cheney said. "Lately it seems Charlie Crist cannot be trusted even to remain a Republican." But Cheney called on Crist to either stay in the primary or drop out of the race altogether, rather than run as an independent. Splitting the Republican vote in a three-way race would likely benefit the Democratic candidate, U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek. "The only winners from an independent bid by Crist would be Barack Obama and (Senate Majority Leader) Harry Reid," Cheney said.

Considering the effect a hug from Obama has had on his campaign, Crist may be reluctant to do the President and the Democrats any favors. But he may also have in mind the "kiss of death" President George W. Bush planted on Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, a fervent supporter of the Iraq War, after the State of the Union address in 2006. That image helped liberal Democrats in Connecticut defeat Lieberman in that year's primary. Lieberman then ran as an independent and won reelection.

Photo of Marco Rubio: AP Images



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