



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 29, 2010

Florida Senate Race Reveals Backroom Deals

Former President Bill Clinton has catapulted himself into the campaign arena this year, traveling the nation to stump for his favorite candidates, but also attempting to pressure senatorial candidates into dropping out of their primaries. Clinton's most recent campaign arm-twisting involves a reported attempt to persuade Florida's Democratic Senate candidate, Kendrick Meek, to step down from Florida's three-way Senate race between Meek, Florida Governor Charlie Crist (Independent), and Tea Party favorite Marco Rubio.



CBS News has confirmed that Clinton's deal was actually conceived by Charlie Crist, as Crist approached Clinton's camp offering a deal of his own: "Convince Meek to drop out of the race and if Crist won, he would caucus with Democrats, not Republicans, in the Senate."

According to the *New York Times*, "Matt McKenna, Mr. Clinton's spokesman, said the former president had concluded that Mr. Meek's candidacy was struggling and was urging him to drop out and endorse Charlie Crist, the state's Republican governor, who is running for the Senate as an independent."

Dubbing Clinton's maneuver a "back-channel effort," the *New York Times* explains that Clinton's primary concern is that the state of Florida will fall under the influence of Republican Senate candidate Marco Rubio. The governorship of the state is also up for grabs this year, in a closely contested race between Democrat Alex Sink and Republican Rick Scott.

The *New York Times* claims that Clinton was nearly successful in his negotiations with Meek. An official involved in the Clinton-Meek conversations, who wishes to remain unidentified, claims, "It was a done deal." However, the negotiation fell through last weekend after Meek sent word to Clinton that "he had to finish what he started no matter what the ramifications."

Meek's office adamantly denies the claims. "The article is not true," said Meek's campaign manager, Abe Dyk. "Kendrick Meek was never dropping out of this race, is never dropping out of this race, and will never drop out of this race."

Meek denied allegations of the interaction with Clinton at a news conference in Miami on Thursday night. "The press report from Politico that is out there is inaccurate — at best. Any rumor or statement by anyone that says that I made a decision to get out of the race is inaccurate."

However, on this morning's episode of CBS' "The Early Show," Meek indicated that he has in fact been advised by Bill Clinton, but stressed that the former president's advice never involved dropping out of the Senate race.

"We did not come to any kind of agreement that I would get out of the race," he emphasized. "The president [Clinton] did not push me to do so. I did not tell him that I wanted to do it. We talked about it and that's it."



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However, with confirmations that Crist in fact made a deal with Bill Clinton to force Meek out of the election, as well as an account from CBS News' Mark Ambinder, who confirmed with multiple sources close to the situation that Meek was near to agreeing to Clinton's deal, it seems the weight of evidence is against Meek.

Clinton's role in the dealings is reminiscent of earlier this year when he acted as a go-between for the White House with Democratic Senatorial candidate Joe Sestak, urging him to drop out of the Democratic primary against Arlen Specter.

Brian Walsh, spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, labeled Clinton's negotiations with Meek "politics as usual Secret deals, backroom negotiations and the failed promises of transparency are critical reasons why Democrats find themselves standing on the doorstep of sweeping losses in next Tuesday's election."

Crist's behavior in recent months has revealed his willingness to do whatever it takes to secure the Senate seat. When it became clear that he could not acquire the Republican nomination in the primaries, Crist abandoned the GOP and ran as an Independent. Now, sensing loss as Election Day approaches, he has negotiated a deal with the Democrats to give him a greater chance of victory.

Rubio's senior strategist, Todd Harris, explained: "Charlie Crist truly will say and do anything to get elected and hold on to power. Secret deals to trade away principles for power [are] already the problem in Washington ... not the solution. This is simply politics as usual which is exactly what voters across the country are emphatically rejecting this election."

Crist's spokesman, Danny Kanner, defensively asserts that while the story of Crist approaching Clinton is true, "the governor's focus is on uniting common-sense Democrats, independents, and Republicans behind his campaign because he is the one candidate who can defeat Tea Party extremist Marco Rubio and deliver bipartisan results for Florida in Washington."

According to CBS News, "Meek had strong words about Crist's apparent maneuvering," about which he contends he did not know. In his appearance on *The Early Show*, Meek remarked, "Charlie Crist, being a very desperate candidate, feeling that his pathway to victory was me out of this race, was calling the Clinton office. I didn't know that."

Clinton, however, asserts that Meek was not only aware of the ploy but was willing to discuss the possibility of withdrawing from the race.

"I said in the end, you know, he would have to do what he thought was right. He'd have to do what he felt right about," Clinton said. He also claims that he wishes to keep the specifics of their conversation to himself, as the two politicians have been friends for a long time.

As Florida's Senate race is critical for President Obama, the White House is hoping for a friendly face in that Senate seat. However, aides to Bill Clinton assert that the White House had no part in the negotiations with Crist and Meek.

Whether Florida will see the election of another Obama-friendly senator is yet to be determined. The *New York Times* reports, "In recent days, Mr. Crist has been gaining on Mr. Rubio even as Mr. Meek's numbers have faltered. A recent poll put Mr. Crist just 7 percentage points behind his Republican rival. There had been reports for several weeks that Mr. Meek was being urged privately to consider dropping out of the contest, but the Democrat said repeated that he was staying in until the end."

Photo: In this Oct. 20, 2010 file photo, Florida Democratic senate candidate Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Fla., left, listens to former President Bill



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Clinton address supporters during a campaign rally for Meek at the University of Central Florida in Orlando: AP Images



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