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The candidates are no longer running — some are dead — but their campaigns keep going, and keep spending.

Read the pdf or click here to read online

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — It’s been more than a decade since South Florida Rep. Mark Foley was forced out of Congress for sending sexual text messages to teenage boys.

But Foley tapped his congressional campaign fund to dine on the Palm Beach social circuit four times in early 2017, ending with a $450 luncheon at the Forum Club of the Palm Beaches.

Then there’s baseball-star-turned-senator Jim Bunning of Kentucky. He paid his daughter $94,800 from campaign money in the four years after he left office, only stopping when he’d bled his fund dry.

And over the past 17 months, political advisor Dylan Beesley paid his firm more than $100,000 from the campaign account of Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai for “consulting services.” It’s hard to imagine what Beesley advised. Takai was dead that whole time.

In their political afterlife, former...
politicians and their staffers are hoarding unspent campaign donations for years and using them to finance their lifestyles, advance new careers and pay family members, an investigation by the Tampa Bay Times, 10News WTSP and TEGNA-owned TV stations found.

Their spending makes a mockery of one of the fundamental principles of America's campaign finance laws: Donations must be spent only on politics, not politicians' personal lives.

Times/WTSP reporters analyzed more than 1 million records detailing the spending of former U.S. lawmakers and federal candidates. They found roughly 100 of these zombie campaigns, still spending even though their candidate's political career had been laid to rest.

Of course, history is full of politicians stretching the definition of legitimate campaign expenses. But most of those cases at least involved a campaign of some sort.

By contrast, former Rep. Steven LaTourette, R-Ohio, had been out of office for more than three years when he spent $4,555 on Ohio State football tickets. Former Rep. Jim Turner, D-Texas, rented office space from his father's hardware company for $9,600 and paid his wife almost $22,000 to handle paperwork in the six years after he left office.

Other ex-candidates spent leftover donations on airline tickets, club memberships, a limo trip, cell phones, parking and new computers, the investigation found. Some former lawmakers paid themselves thousands of dollars without providing any explanation for where the money went. One spent $940 at Total Wine.

They weren't all low-profile political figures. Former Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, still has an active presidential campaign account that he used to pay almost $16,170 to his daughter through 2017, five years after he last sought office.

None of the spending was formally investigated by the Federal Election Commission, which is responsible for stopping federal candidates from treating their campaigns like personal slush funds.

By law, donations should be spent on campaigning and the cost of being in office. They can also be refunded to donors or given away to other candidates, political committees or charities.

But the law doesn't stop ex-lawmakers and losing candidates from keeping their campaigns running forever, even if they never re-enter politics.

Twenty of the campaigns identified by the Times/WTSP stayed active for more than a decade. Eight kept on spending even after the candidate they were supposedly working to elect had died — buying lavish dinners, paying cell phone bills and writing rent checks.
Six campaign finance experts told Times/WTSP reporters that some of the zombie campaign spending was a potential election-law violation that should have been investigated by the FEC.

“There’s just no legitimate explanation for that, and it’s just outrageous,” said Noah Bookbinder, executive director of nonpartisan watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. “It’s the kind of abuse that people only perpetrate when they’re sure nobody is watching and they can get away with anything.”

Campaign experts said that while FEC rules are vague, it’s clear that someone out of politics should not have expenses that come with campaigning.

“It’s hard to imagine how some of this is not illegal,” said Larry Noble, a former FEC attorney and senior director of ethics for the Washington-based Campaign Legal Center. “If you’re not in office and you aren’t running, there aren’t a lot of expenditures you should be having.”

**The iPad and the country club**

If anyone demonstrates how much former lawmakers can get away with, it’s Robin Tallon Jr.

The South Carolina Democrat left the House of Representatives in January 1993, just as Bill Clinton was entering the White House, to set himself up as a D.C. lobbyist.

Tallon was hardly an influential individual cases that may end up under investigation in the future.

“There are personal use prohibitions,” Hilland said. “Outside of that, if there are still costs associated with a campaign, utilities or a lease on a building – that can still be paid.”

Confronted about their spending, most candidates said they kept their accounts open in case they ran again one day, and they disputed that the money benefited them personally.

Several said they would consider shutting their campaigns down. Many didn’t return requests for comment. Two fled when questioned about their spending by reporters from the Times/WTSP and TEG-NA-owned partner TV stations around the country.

Foley, the former Palm Beach congressman, said ethical lines are “in the eye of the beholder,” but added that the FEC doesn’t draw lines or provide guidance.

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Tallon was hardly an influential
lawmaker. He was primary sponsor of only two bills that became law, according to govtrack.us. One was to designate National Tourism Week.

But his decade in Congress left him with more than $400,000 in his campaign account. He kept it open, then invested the money, turning it into $1 million.

In 2005, Tallon embarked on a spending spree that is still ongoing. It included more than $31,000 in “reimbursements” paid to himself without any explanation, federal records show. Another $20,000 was paid to his son, Robert Tallon III, who was listed as campaign treasurer.

Tallon’s campaign bought a $4,000 computer in 2007, a $2,300 computer in 2014 and a $900 iPad in 2017.

Since Tallon was no longer campaigning, some of his spending looks like personal use of campaign funds, said Adav Noti, a former attorney for the FEC who is now a senior director at the Campaign Legal Center. “It’s almost inconceivable that spending is legal,” Noti said. “That’s 25 years after he left office.”

Some of Tallon’s other expenditures are even harder to tie to politics. Between 2007 and 2011, he paid roughly $8,200 in “dues” to an organization he identified only as “CCSC.”

There are no major political groups or charitable organizations in South Carolina with those initials. Despite FEC rules, Tallon’s reports don’t list an address for the recipient. Tallon does, however, live in a 4,400-square-foot home in a development with the same initials: the Country Club of South Carolina.

Those payments from Tallon are in line with the Florence, S.C. club’s $300 monthly membership dues and
food minimum total.

In a phone interview, Tallon defended keeping his campaign account open, saying he always considered another potential run. The iPad was to do his campaign's paperwork and to keep up with its investments — which would be the only legal use of the device, since it was bought with campaign money, experts said.

Tallon did not return subsequent calls or respond to a letter asking about his “CCSC” spending. He kicked a camera crew from WTSP partner station WCNC off his property last week.

Still, in the earlier interview, the 71-year-old conceded that after being out of office for a quarter of a century, it’s probably time to shut the campaign down.

“I don’t think the likelihood of (running for office) is very high right now, and I’m retiring from my consulting work in Washington,” he said in November. “I need to give that money away at this point.”

He filed his latest campaign report on Jan. 16. It shows his campaign is still open.

**Bending the rules**

The laws on campaign spending are simple if vague.

The money cannot be used for costs unrelated to campaigning or serving in office.

Items like clothing, country club fees and groceries, for example, are prohibited. Campaign workers’ salaries, office space, cell phones and internet service are allowed, when used for campaign purposes.

But the rules barely address what is permitted once a politician leaves office.

It would be easy for the FEC to find campaigns exploiting that loophole.

*Times/WTSP* reporters used the FEC’s own data to identify roughly 100 zombie campaigns that have spent more than $20 million since 1995.

The *Times* included campaigns that kept spending more than six months after the candidate died. For the other campaigns, the analysis didn’t consider spending in the first two years to give candidates time to get out of leases, cell phone contracts and other commitments.

That’s far longer than candidates should need. A 2013 FEC advisory opinion said outgoing politicians should wind down campaign expenses within six months. Former independent Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Rep. Charlie Norwood, R-Ga., both donated more than 90 percent of their money to charity and closed their campaigns within a year of leaving office.

Combined, eight zombie campaigns spent $55,000 renting office space. Twenty-one paid more than $53,000 in cell phone bills.

Four campaigns each spent more than $1,500 buying new computers, including Foley’s, which bought a $1,600 computer in 2015. Experts said that would be legal only if the computers were used solely for campaign paperwork.

Nearly 40 candidates kept aides or campaign staff on the payroll, including 12 campaigns that paid a candidate’s family member.

FEC rules allow payments to family members who do genuine work for a campaign as long as they are paid at “market rate.”

But the payments vary wildly. Bunning’s campaign paid his daughter more than $2,100 per month. Rep. Elton Gallegly, R-Calif., paid his spouse just $300 per month for bookkeeping and filing FEC forms.

Other spending makes even less sense when out of office.

In total, 28 former candidates spent more than $94,000 on travel.

Thirty-nine spent $246,000 combined hosting or attending events, including the unveiling of a portrait and tickets for their spouses to attend a First Lady’s Luncheon.

Fifty-one of the zombie candidates had an extra incentive to hang onto campaign cash: they went into the lobbying industry.
Campaigns are allowed to give to other candidates and PACs, even if those donations could buy influence that benefits their clients. Their campaigns donated almost $4.5 million to political candidates and causes, the Times/WTSP analysis found.

Tallon was one of them. His campaign donated $69,000 to political causes — including tens of thousands of the dollars he raised as a Democrat to Republican politicians — and paid roughly $750 in dues to the Capitol Hill Club, a private social club for D.C. Republicans. In 2009 he also gave $5,000 to a political action committee formed by Imperial Tobacco Group, a client of his lobbying firm.

Former Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Ala., donated almost $340,000 after becoming chairman of a lobbying firm. Former Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-Texas, admitted that some of the $60,000 he donated was “absolutely” helpful in his lobbying career.

“It’s the way it is, whether you have a political fund or whether you were a private citizen writing checks out of your own account,” he said.

A dead giveaway

If FEC rules are vague about candidates who retire, they say even less about what should happen to campaign funds when the candidate dies. Asked about dead candidates’ spending, FEC officials admitted their analysts could review a campaign’s report without ever realizing that the candidate is dead.

That might explain why they never questioned the spending of former New York congressman Thomas J. Manton’s campaign, which paid his treasurer a salary for two years after Manton died.

Takai’s campaign stopped doing almost everything after the Hawaii congressman died in July 2016 — except paying one man.

That was Beesley, 29, who had been the Democrat’s chief strategist since March 2015. A former legislative assistant to Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, Beesley also worked as Hawaii State Director for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign.

Two months after Takai’s death, paperwork filed with the FEC identified Beesley as the campaign’s treasurer, which meant he had control over its checkbook.

In the 17 months since Takai’s death, Beesley paid roughly $5,700 a month to Lanakila Strategies, his own consulting firm.

Beesley’s most recent payments, reported in January, brought the total paid to Lanakila to more than $100,000, or 70 percent of Takai’s posthumous campaign spending.

“Wow,” said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., one of Takai’s friends in Congress, when told of Beesley’s spending. “I don’t know if Mark would really want to see that happening with the money he raised to run for re-election.”

The Times/WTSP, in partnership with Honolulu affiliate KGMB/KHNL, began pressing Beesley for answers in early January.

Three days later, the Honolulu Star Advertiser reported on Beesley’s payments. The Campaign Legal Center then filed a complaint with the FEC, which is pending.

In a written statement, Beesley said he was paid to be the campaign’s treasurer.

He also released a statement that he said was attributable to a spokesman for Takai’s family. “Dylan Beesley supported Mark’s campaign before Mark’s passing and, at our request, has stayed on as campaign treasurer to help manage the campaigns affairs,” the statement said. “He has worked to help us to focus on the next steps so that we could close the campaign down and create a foundation in Mark’s name and use it for good causes here in Hawaii. Payments to him during this period were authorized.”

Takai’s family did not respond to a letter sent by the Times/WTSP seeking comment.

The Mark Takai Foundation wasn’t incorporated until Jan. 11, Hawaii state business records show — two
FORER U.S. REP. RON PAUL, R-TEXAS

*Left office: 2013*

$16,170 paid to his daughter, Jan. 2013 to Sept. 2017

KHOU Houston found Paul in Clute, Texas.

**Reporter:** Hey Dr. Paul, let me catch up with you for a sec.

**Reporter:** Wanted to ask you a question or two about your campaign account spending, sir. Do you just have a moment?

**Reporter:** We reached out to you by phone and email and we haven’t heard back.

**Reporter:** Is it appropriate to keep your daughter on the payroll years after you’ve left office?

**Reporter:** Why wouldn’t you give us just a moment?

Paul drove away without answering a single question.
days after KGMB/KHNL contacted Beesley about his spending and 16 months after he became treasurer of the campaign.

Many campaign treasurers are paid to file campaign reports with the FEC. But Takai’s campaign was paying $500 per month to CFO Compliance, a national group that specializes in campaign paperwork.

Beesley declined multiple requests for an interview.

Noble, the former FEC attorney and CLC ethics director, said the FEC should investigate Beesley’s spending.

“I've not heard of a situation where, after the death of the office holder or candidate, that the committee keeps on paying people,” Noble said. “He can't keep it going indefinitely while he spends money on himself.”

‘Designed to gridlock’

One easy way to stop former lawmakers from misspending campaign money would be for Congress to set a time limit for how long zombie campaigns can remain open.

But the FEC’s Democratic and Republican commissioners, who can recommend new rules to Congress, almost never agree. In 2016, the commission deadlocked on one-third of enforcement votes.

“The FEC was designed to gridlock,” said Meredith McGeehee, executive director of Issue One, a nonpartisan political reform group.

In Congress, the few attempts to address these campaigns have stalled. Lawmakers are reluctant to put additional restrictions on themselves, said Noti, the former FEC attorney.

Rep. Takano, the California Democrat, filed the “Let It Go” act in both 2015 and 2017 requiring outgoing members to close their campaign accounts within six years or before they go into lobbying.

And Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., filed a bill four times between 2007 and 2015 that would have let lawmakers designate a family member to take over their campaign accounts once they die.

Takano's bill didn't get a hearing. Jones' passed the House three times, then died in the Senate.

Jones said current House Speaker Paul Ryan and other lawmakers have no interest in campaign finance reform.

“Too many people like the system the way it is,” Jones said in an interview.

Ryan’s spokeswoman did not provide a comment.

The FEC was created to oversee campaign spending in 1975, after Richard Nixon’s re-election campaign paid for the burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate office complex.

But Congress doesn’t fund the agency very well, experts say. After adjusting for inflation, its $76 million annual budget is smaller than it was in 2010. Last year, it had just 34 analysts to review more than 26 million financial transactions.

Former candidates are especially likely to escape scrutiny since they do not have political opponents to challenge their spending. The FEC almost never catches questionable spending itself. All but eight of the FEC’s 128 closed investigations last year started with an outside complaint.

FEC analysts are also told to ignore suspicious spending unless the amount of money or number of transactions raises above a secret threshold, which the agency refuses to disclose, documents show.

“There is really not a lot of incentive for this agency to go off and start snooping and investigating current members, much less former members,” McGeehee said. “It does not have a robust investigatory arm. That’s not how the agency was designed.”

Nonetheless, zombie campaigns have occasionally come to the agency’s attention.

Every time, the agency did nothing, and the campaign carried on.

Eight campaigns identified by the Times/WTSP sent the FEC paperwork stating that they were not run-
In July 2011, former Virginia Rep. Rick Boucher’s treasurer informed the FEC in writing that “the candidate has no intention of seeking office in future election cycles.” By then, the Democrat was already working for law firm Sidley Austin.

But Boucher, who did not return calls or emails for comment, kept on spending. Since 2013, he has paid $33,000 to staffers for “reimbursements” and “contract labor,” and spent nearly $4,900 on cell phone bills, office supplies, internet services and postage. His campaign account is still open.

In 2010, the FEC wrote to former Colorado Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell warning that the $2,000 per month he was paying his daughter-in-law, Karen Allard Campbell, could “possibly constitute personal use of the committee’s campaign funds.”

At that point, Campbell had been out of office for five years, and paying her for the past four.

His campaign treasurer responded on a letterhead that still touted Campbell as “U.S. Senator for Colorado.” It said Karen Campbell was providing the campaign “bona fide” services, including preparing its tax forms.

At the time, the Republican was also paying outside firms to do “tax preparation,” campaign finance records show.

The FEC let the matter drop, and the checks to his daughter-in-law kept coming for another five years. Campbell declined requests for an interview.

If the law doesn’t change, there will likely be more cases like his.

Since 2016, more than 40 House and Senate incumbents have resigned or announced they will not run in the 2018 midterm election.

The soon-to-be ex-politicians are sitting on more than $55 million in campaign donations.
Methodology

To identify zombie campaigns, *Times/WTSP* reporters used the Federal Election Commission’s API to download more than 1 million disbursement records, ranging from the earliest records in the FEC’s database up to the third quarter of 2017.

Then reporters ranked each campaign by the number of expenditures it made after the campaign’s final election cycle. Then reporters hand-reviewed more than 350 campaigns’ spending.

Reporters excluded campaigns that had too few expenditures and campaigns paying back old debt. They then categorized more than 10,000 rows of data by type of spending. The entire database is available online at tampabay.com/zombiedatabase.

The reporters did not include data within two years of a campaign’s last election or the last time a politician held office. This was to give campaigns ample time to pay off debts, get out of leases and end other contracts. They also removed records that did not have a date, and did not tag tax payments, refunds, negative amounts or disgorgements. They categorized payments according to the campaign’s listed disbursement description.

The database also includes former politicians who moved onto new careers as lobbyists, employees of lobbying firms or employees of private companies working in lobbying roles. The reporters searched the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, Open Secrets’ Revolving Door database and news articles to look for signs that a former candidate had taken work representing special interests, whether or not they formally registered as a lobbyist. Donations from their campaigns are included in the database. About 20 of the 102 zombie campaigns were primarily identified based on this criteria.

Some data from the FEC API was incomplete, missing fields like dates, amounts, recipient names or descriptions for the disbursements. Whenever possible, reporters corrected inaccurate data based on the original paper filings.
See the report

Published on WTSP.com on June 29, compiling pieces that aired on WTSP-TV and other TEGNA television stations across the country throughout the first six months of the year, starting in February.
Welcome to our 10 Investigates special on Zombie Campaigns; the controversial committees that live on for years, even after a politician’s career has died. It is a phrase coined by investigative reporter Noah Pransky, who partnered with The Tampa Bay Times to expose giant loopholes in campaign finance laws. They found some disgraced - and even some dead - Congress members still politically active, blowing through money on things like dinner and drinks, iPads, and football tickets. It’s only been five months since their investigation launched, but it’s already garnered national attention, accolades and action.

Washington has noticed too. Our ZombieCampaigns.com website and social media videos have gone viral, prompting formal investigations on congressional spending. Two members of Congress, from opposite sides of the aisle, got together to file a bill to curb the abuse and the Federal Election Commission changed federal campaign finance rules. Among the 100+ politicians put under the microscope: former presidential candidates, as well as members of President Trump’s cabinet.

“Zombie Campaigns” was the result of a year-long investigation into millions of FEC records; this was Noah Pransky’s first story in revealing his findings.

01:12 – Drain the Swamp

“No drain the swamp” they said, focusing the nation’s attention on all the money that runs Washington. But with the attention on the swamp creatures in the Capital…nobody seems to be paying attention to the “zombies. FORMER lawmakers whose political careers are dead…yet their campaigns have come to life, to support their “new careers and lifestyles, “after they leave office.

{Reporter} “Five nights in a Virginia hotel – that was for a campaign?”
{Sen. Saxby Chambliss} “Yes it was.”
{Reporter} “It was? After you retired?”

But its not just that former Georgia Senator keeping his campaign alive long after retirement….we even found former Congressmen still spending…years after they DIED! This campaign spending loophole is so large…you can drive a hearse through it.

{Noah Bookbinder, CREW Exec Dir} “If you can’t sometimes laugh at it, you can’t come to work every day.”

Noah Bookbinder is a former federal prosecutor who’s been trying to “drain the swamp” since before it was a campaign slogan! He hasn’t quite succeeded yet….in fact…he says it
keeps getting harder.

{Bookbinder} “I’m more worried than mad; I’m worried it could get to a point we can’t come back from.”

Which is why, in his current job at Executive Director for nonprofit watchdog group CREW: ‘Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington”...Bookbinder has helped file lawsuits against politicians who use campaign money as personal slush funds. But even he was surprised at what we found, including a list of a *hundred former Congressmembers, Senators, and presidential candidates still spending campaign money long after giving up the game.

{Bookbinder} Its really shameful when you see this many people exploiting the system.

The Federal Election Commission says candidates should *never* personally benefit from campaign contributions. And after a 6-month wind-down period, retired lawmakers should close their accounts and donate leftover money to charity, or other established political committees. Except, they aren’t *required* to retire their *campaigns... So these politicians can keep their lucrative accounts open... indefinitely. Our team – in partnership with the Tampa Bay Times – spent a year analyzing more than a *million public campaign finance records we downloaded from the FEC’s webpage. And, we traveled the country to interview reluctant politicians. Like, former Texas Congressman and presidential hopeful Ron Paul:

{Reporter} “Wanted to ask you a question or two about your campaign account spending, do you have a moment (Paul slams car door shut) Dr. Paul?”

These former lawmakers spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on questionable items like tickets to sporting events...cell phone bills... and what appear to be vacations. Former Georgia Senator Saxby Chambliss, is still spending from a campaign account after leaving Washington for a lobbying firm:

{Reporter} “You retired from Senate three years ago. Why do you still have a campaign account open?”

{Sen. Saxby Chambliss} “Because there’s money in it.”

Get this: he’s *far from the worst offender...*

- Florida Congressman Mark Foley resigned in shame when he was caught sexting high schoolers. The Republican has spent the last decade using leftover campaign cash on memberships to posh social clubs in West Palm Beach...as well as travel, meals, and a personal computer!
- Ron Paul hasn’t campaigned for anything in more than five years... but has continued to cut tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of checks to his daughter to manage his “campaign” finances...
- the granddaddy of them all?... is South Carolina Democrat, Robin Tallon...who hasn’t served in Congress in 25 years! He’s spent much of that time *living off his old campaign cash:* paying for travel, a new iPad, and dues to his country club...which is actually one of the few things the FEC *does* specifically prohibit under any circumstance!
There's just no legitimate explanation for that and its just outrageous...it's the kind of abuse that people only perpetrate when they're sure nobody is watching and they can get away with anything."

The more we dug, the more outrageous the abuse. Case in point: former Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai. His campaign has paid a political operative 100+ thousand dollars to act as treasurer and consultant.... AFTER Takai left office. What makes it so outrageous? Well, Congressman Takai died from cancer in 2016. Meaning the consultant who took charge of the money...is paying himself campaign cash...to consult on a dead man's campaign. And the Federal Elections Commission, which has ONE JOB – oversee campaign spending - has done nothing to stop these absurdities.

"If the Federal Election Commission isn't going to act on this, maybe the only way to get action on this is to shame people...and shining a light on what's happening can do that."

While we're at it, let's shine a light on the other dead candidates we found spending campaign cash post-mortem...... in Nebraska... Ohio...New York, and New Jersey! All told – the 100-plus campaigns we identified as exploiting the system... are sitting on TENS of millions of dollars in cash...with virtually no oversight on how they can spend it.

Former Florida Senator George LeMieux:

"Why not just close the account down and roll the money into charity?"

"I may, and that's what I've been advised to do..."

"Both Democrats and Republicans are committing the abuses; both Democratic and Republicans should be getting behind doing something about it."

There have been efforts to curb the abuses in recent years, but you haven't heard about them...because the bills never got a single hearing. As for the political operative spending a dead man's campaign cash? He says he's just doing what the family of the former Congressman wants. The family has yet to return our requests for comment.

Noah Pransky, 10Investigates.

06:03 – Viral Video

In addition to the original reporting, 10 Investigates built Zombie-Campaigns.com. It's a one-stop-shop for you to read our story, dig into our online database of former candidates taking advantage of the system, and of course, watching our videos. That includes a few extra segments that caught fire on social media: a throwback to the 1990s-era Pop-Up Video, and a tribute to the 1970s-era Schoolhouse Rock.

06:26 – SchoolHouse Mock

It's such a giant loophole – you can still spend when you're dead! Friends can claim you're campaign-
ing to pay for their dinner spread. And when Congress had a chance to fix, it's a bill they chose to kill.

Because one day...they'll too have zombie accounts.................likely worth a Mil!

06:44 - Zombie Campaigns, Part II
This story starts...with a Disney showtune. In a gay bar...a stone's throw from the U.S. Capital. It was inspiration for a bill introduced in Congress last year:

{U.S. Rep Mark Takano, D-California} “Let it go. At some point, you gotta let it go.”

California Congressman Mark Takano is a Democrat who wants to ‘drain the swamp’ in Washington. And the openly-gay lawmaker says a lightbulb went off one night when he was among the showtunes-loving crowd at JR’s.

{Takano} “It’s very difficult to change anything if you're not in the majority...I'm hoping to leverage popular culture here...”

{Reporter} “Whatever it takes.”

{Takano} “Whatever it takes.”

Thus, the “Let it Go” Act – a bill designed to close a little-known, but much-abused loophole...that allows former lawmakers to keep spending their campaign cash long after their careers are over; Not on campaigning, but on subsidizing their lifestyles!!!

{Takano} “I think it’s a very reasonable thing we're asking former members to do.”

We stumbled upon Takano’s crusade as we were investigating “zombie campaigns” – lucrative accounts, belonging to former politicians who have long retired, but are still spending like they’re not....sometimes, violating federal laws that prohibit personal benefit from campaign funds. Our team, in partnership with the Tampa Bay Times, combed federal election records to identify more than *one hundred campaigns with questionable spending *years after the lawmaker stopped campaigning – sometimes for *decades after they retired! You might recognize some of them...Mark Foley; Joe Kennedy II; Ron Paul..... spending funds on things like fancy dinners...travel...and paying family members. And nobody in Washington seems to notice...or care.

{Takano} “It is legal! But I don’t think it should be!”

Takano's bill simply said candidates had six years after they stop running to close their accounts down...meaning their leftover campaign cash would go to charity or another political committee. That's 12 times longer than the FEC says should be necessary?!? But that bill...didn't even get a hearing.

{Reporter} You retired from Senate three years ago...why do you still have a campaign account open?!

No surprise, former Georgia Senator Saxby Chambliss, and the owners of other zombie campaigns we tracked down all over the country...weren’t in the mood to talk.

{Reporter} “You spent thousands of dollars on things like hotel rooms and food. How is that campaigning...after you retired?”

{Chambliss} “We don't have anything to discuss.”

While other still-spending candidates had no comment at all....BECAUSE THEY WERE DEAD!

{Reporter} We found candidates with campaigns open for years after they died, still spending money.

{Takano} Ha! Well, that....is.....incredible.

Somewhere...the FEC still didn’t notice.

{Meredith McGehee, Executive Director IssueOne} “I often call the FEC the ‘failure to enforce commission.”

Meredith McGehee is the Executive Director at IssueOne, a nonpartisan DC nonprofit, dedicated to getting the money "out" of politics...so Congress can go back to working for the people. She says the abuses run rampant because of both the lack of enforcement...and efforts by House and Senate leadership to kill efforts to reform campaign finance laws.
{McGehee} “Really, what it’s going to take is some brave people on the Hill to step forward and be willing to offend their leadership and spend their political capital... and say, this system needs to change for the better.”

Meet ‘brave person on the Hill,’ Walter Jones – a longtime Republican Congressman from North Carolina.

{U.S. Rep Walter Jones, R-North Carolina} “If any member of Congress is not willing to let sunshine in, then the Democracy is threatened.”

Jones tells us, he’ll re-file a bill that could curb controversial spending “after” a member dies... by allowing him or her to designate how leftover campaign funds should be disbursed in case of death. He may also propose mandating that all leftover cash be sent to other campaigns or charities within *ONE YEAR* of a member’s death. The last time he filed his bill... it was killed by his fellow Republicans in the Senate.

{Jones} “Well Noah, its just that no one seems to care about reform....I’ve made the comment back in my district that the only way we’re going to get reform is to have a scandal.”

A scandal, like... dead candidates spending campaign cash?

{Takano} “We have enough of a swamp... we should drain as much of the swamp as we can, and I regard this as very modest...effort. Let your money go to a higher purpose for what you built your career on.”

Senator Saxby Chambliss, whom we caught up with after he ignored numerous requests for an interview... Later sent a short statement that said he complies with all federal laws and discloses all of his campaign expenditures.... Which *may* be true... but critics say, when federal law allows a retired lawmaker to expense five nights in a ritzy resort... it may be time to re-assess our laws. In Washington, Noah Pransky, 10 Investigates.

11:47 – FEC action
This investigation didn’t just involve collaborating with the Tampa Bay Times; 10 Investigates spent nearly a year collaborating with dozens of stations across the country within the TEGA television network. The series also inspired a tremendous amount of additional reporting on Zombie Campaigns, from Hawaii to San Francisco to Maine. National outlets followed as well, including “Zombie” reports from the Huffington Post, Newsday, and Bloomberg. It was the talk of Twitter once our stories went live,
collecting thousands of clicks and retweets from around the country; an “ask me anything” session with our investigative team reached the No. 1 overall spot on Reddit; and a number of watchdog groups sounded alarms, pressing the Federal Election Commission to change its rules. This is former FEC chair Ann Ravel:

“The law absolutely has to change. I mean, the fact that a person has received campaigns funds that are meant for certain things and it pays off individuals is absolutely not what was intended by the law.”

And change was not far away. When our Zombie Campaign special returns, we’ll tell you how both the FEC and members of Congress started to change their ways.

And don’t forget you can see more of our extensive reporting with all the documents we’ve gathered on ZombieCampaigns.com. Keep it here, we’ll be right back.

13:19 – Congressional action
Welcome back. One of the most significant changes in the last five months since 10 Investigates and the Tampa Bay Times broke the Zombie Campaigns story has come from the FEC. In April, the agency responded to our reporting and announced they would start reviewing former lawmakers’ campaign spending for the first time. In fact, they credited our stories for the rare administrative action; but the weakened enforcement has been just one part of the problem. The other issue stems from vague laws with giant loopholes. Former Congressmembers reached Noah, calling on their old colleagues in the House and Senate to step up for a fix.

{Fmr US Rep Trey Radel} “I don’t think there’s anyone in their right mind that thinks dead candidates should be spending money for someone to consult on their campaign. They’re dead!”

Former Congressman Trey Radel is now the host of a conservative radio show out of Southwest Florida. And he says his phones lit up after reading the headlines from our story.

{Radel} “These examples may not technically violate the letter of the law; undoubtedly they violate the spirit of the law - not only within the little bubble of Washington D.C., but also what donors across the United States want from their members of Congress.”

Radel is no stranger to controversy himself; he resigned in 2014 after he was caught in D.C. with cocaine. Yet he still managed to comply with the Federal Election Commission’s guidelines that say you should wind campaign spending down after 6 months. That guideline though, is
not a requirement, which has allowed some well-funded lawmakers to continue to personally profit from donations years after leaving D.C.

{Radel} “It’s nothing short of insane.”

14:56 – Bill filed
The message was heard. In April, Republican Gus Bilirakis and Democrat Kathy Castor filed a bipartisan bill based on 10 Investigatives’ reporting. They came to our studio to give us that news first.

{Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa} “People don’t expect you to be able to use your campaign account to pay club fees (or) cell phone bills, especially years and years after you leave office.”

Just maybe, the “Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain” Act can stop that.

{Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor} “This needs to be done. And the public really appreciates this.”

Our investigation revealed some Congressmembers spending leftover campaign funds 25 years after leaving office!

{NATS} “get outta here!”

Others, paying family members:

{NATS} “Dr Paul?”

...instead, of closing down accounts when they’re done campaigning, and rolling the money into other political or charitable accounts, as the Federal Election Commission suggests.

The new bill proposes to:
- Require former Congressmembers to close down their campaign accounts within two years of leaving office;
- Prohibit payments to family members;
- And ban former Congressmembers from lobbying until they’ve closed down their old accounts; a small step toward restoring public trust, according to Castor and Bilirakis. But also, a tough sell to their counterparts in Congress.

{Reporter} “You’re biting off a lot here.”

{Bilirakis} “It is an ambitious effort. But we’re away from our families... we’ve got to do good things up there; otherwise it’s not worth it.”

That bill is now making its way through the House Administration Committee. But it’s got an uphill battle, thanks to some Congressmembers like Lakeland’s Dennis Ross. The prominent Republican isn’t on the House Administration Committee, but he’s what we call a “zombie-in-training.” When the four-term Congressman unexpectedly announced his retirement two months ago, Noah asked if he planned on winding down his campaign account after he left office. The response: a straightforward “No.” Ross is one of 64 Congressmembers who won’t run for reelection in the fall, and togeth-
er they have almost $100,000,000 in banked donations with little restriction on how they can spend it.

16:54 – Zombies in the White House

That doesn’t include the five million in campaign dollars still held by current and former members of President Trump’s cabinet. Many of them have also chosen to keep their old campaign account open. And recently, Noah took to Facebook to explain what all the president’s men are still doing with that money.

Our zombie campaign story has made it all the way to the White House. Kind of. See, while we’ve been exposing the former Congressmembers spending old campaign funds in their new careers as lobbyists or consultants, we also now learn that there are seven former politicians still spending after taking new jobs in President Trump’s Cabinet!

So who are they? Well, you don’t have the a brain surgeon to figure this. In fact, one of them is brain surgeon Ben Carson. The secretary of HUD is still spending his old donations, more than two years after quitting his presidential campaign. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s been spending thousands to keep his campaign officially up and running since leaving Congress. That includes a $1200 meal last year at the swanky Capitol Hill Club. Then there’s Tom Price, the now-former Health and Human Services Secretary, who had to resign in September after he was caught spending hundreds of thousands of tax dollars on charter flights. He was spending his old congressional campaign funds too, and still hasn’t stopped. Interior Secretary Rice has blown through more than 40 grand in campaign funds since he left Congress on things like meals and travel. That’s on top of the taxpayer-funded travel spending he’s been under fire for.

These findings were first reported by nonprofit watchdog MapLight. All told, these seven men spent hundreds of thousands of campaign dollars since they left Congress on items that included cell phone bills, storage units, and airfare. We didn’t find any evidence of charitable donations from any of those accounts. And with nearly six million more campaign bucks still sitting in the bank, don’t expect their spending to stop anytime soon. By comparison, during President Obama’s eight-year tenure in the White House, three members of his cabinet over that time spent campaign money from old congressional funds more than a year after they left the house. This truly is a loophole both parties take advantage of. Noah Pransky, 10 Investigates.

As we move into the summer, 10 Investigates will continue to track progress on reform, including the FEC’s
first-ever scrutiny on retired lawmakers’ spending, their investigations into possible illegal spending, including the case they opened against the Hawaii consultant exposed in our report, and the possible new restrictions they’ll consider on how campaign funds can be spent.

They recently received dozens of comments from the public about the loopholes, including a letter from Congresswoman Castor. It read, in part, “I believe the commission should clarify the permissible and impermissible uses of campaign funds after a person is no longer running for office. Doing so would prevent some of the most problematic spending and provide needed clarity to former office holders.”

Congress will need to close loopholes in the law too. The “Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act” will have to get through a pair of committees before it could become law. 10 Investigates has been speaking to members of the first committee about the bill; Congressman Bilirakis and Congresswoman Castor have also been working with a committee chairman to get the bill a hearing. You can read about the developments and see all the reporting on Zombie-Campaigns.com. In addition to our original investigation, you can see details on how more than a hundred former lawmakers have taken advantage of the campaign finance system. Thanks for joining us tonight for our 10 Investigates special - you can catch more on Zombie Campaigns and other investigations weekdays on 10 News. Have a good night.
The following two videos were published on wtsp.com and tampabay.com and on the news organizations’ social media accounts, where they were viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

**Schoolhouse Mock**

![Schoolhouse Mock Video](image)

**Popup video with former Senator Saxby Chambliss**

![Popup Video](image)

Published January 31, 2018
To beat Patriots, Eagles didn’t feel pressure, they applied it. - Rich Siegel column, SC

To beat Patriots, Eagles didn’t feel pressure, they applied it.

Jabil to expand Gateway campus

The St. Petersburg electronics maker endures a growth spurt about a move near the Tampa Bay Times.

Moffitt pushes to ease cancer’s impact

It proposes collaboration with engineers to make treatment less nasty.

As rocket readies for lift-off, Florida already sees benefits

SpaceX is helping revitalize the state’s aerospace industry.

Bidding war nears for Monster iOS app

Traders on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Monday, buy orders were not seen.

Ouch

Highly volatile stock market trading brings plunging numbers and concerns about actions from the Fed.

Tapping into cash

First половине

Efforts target ‘Zombie’ spending

Stricter rules sought on government’s unused campaign cash.

Published February 6, 2018
A Washington D.C. watchdog group and a Tampa congresswoman are pushing to close a loophole that has allowed ex-politicians to keep spending campaign donations years after leaving office.

The Campaign Legal Center filed a petition with the Federal Elections Commission Monday calling for stricter rules on how former lawmakers spend leftover campaign money. The CLC cited an investigation by the Tampa Bay Times/10News WTSP and TEGNA-owned TV stations that uncovered former politicians and their staffers hoarding unspent campaign donations for years and using them to finance their lifestyles, advance new careers and pay family members. Some campaigns continued spending after the lawmaker died.

The reporting showed “the appearance or reality of dozens of former officeholders using their campaign accounts as slush funds, or to continue paying for expenses that may have been permissible during their time in office but ceased to be so after they left office,” the petition says.

It asks the FEC to clarify that such spending is not allowed.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa, told the Times/WTSP that she is drafting a bill to “rein this in.”

“If they’re dead, they’re a lobbyist, they’ve been out of the Congress for many years they should not be able to tap their campaign funds for their personal expenses or their lobbying expenses,” Castor said.

She said there should be a time limit on how long campaigns are allowed to remain open, and lawmakers should not be allowed to pay family members after they leave office.

U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist, D-St. Petersburg, said he would support a bill placing more restrictions on spending once out of office.

“I think it’s remarkable some would have campaign funds open that long and some even after individuals are deceased,” he said. “It strikes me as wrong and we need to fix it.”

Other members of Florida’s congressional delegation did not return calls and emails seeking comment.

The petition calls on the FEC to specify what costs former lawmakers can expense with campaign donations. It also asks the agency to place a time limit on how long campaign accounts can remain open.

The current law allows ex-lawmakers and losing candidates to keep their campaigns running forever, even if they never re-enter politics.

It states that donations should be spent on campaigning and the cost of being in office. They can also be refunded to donors or given away to other candidates, political committees or charities.

But the Times/WTSP investigation, called “Zombie Campaigns,” identified more than 100 campaigns that carried on spending at least two years after their candidate left office. In 20 cases, the campaigns stayed open for more than a decade.

The investigation found retired lawmakers buying airline tickets, club memberships, a limo trip, parking and new computers, among other items. It also found spending on cam-
campaign expenses like cell phones, utilities, office rent and internet services, even though the candidate was no longer campaigning.

“There’s not just one or two former Congress members out there breaking the law,” said Adav Noti, a former attorney for the FEC who is now a senior director at the Campaign Legal Center. “There seems to be widespread sense that the rules do not cover activity once the politicians are out of office.”

FEC officials declined to comment on the petition.

Under agency rules, commissioners will now decide whether to conduct a hearing on the CLC’s petition, which would include allowing the public and other parties time to comment.

It could also make a recommendation to Congress to pass legislation to tackle the issue.

Contact Christopher O’Donnell at codonnell@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3446. Follow @codonnell_Times.
Workers skedaddle as construction crane topples over.

LOCAL

Political ‘zombies’ targeted

A bipartisan bill seeks to curtail personal use of donations from shuttered campaigns.

Mayors speak up for good sense

Judge rejects boards’ claims

School districts feel effects of state’s expanded funding of charter schools.

Tampa Bay chief ready to retire

Campaign loan unexplained

A GOP attorney general candidate loaned his campaign $170,000 without giving the source.

Everyday Tampa Bay

Finding beauty under the muck

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JAMES RICHARDS | Photos

Tampa fire chief ready to retire

Saying the city is a destination for firefighters, he champions the department’s diversity.

Judge rejects boards’ claims

School districts feel effects of state’s expanded funding of charter schools.

Campaign loan unexplained

A GOP attorney general candidate loaned his campaign $170,000 without giving the source.

Published April 6, 2018
ST. PETERSBURG — Two local members are calling on Congress to close a loophole that allows ex-lawmakers to hoard unspent campaign donations for years after they leave office.

Rep. Gus Bilirakis, the Palm Harbor Republican, and Rep. Kathy Castor, the Tampa Democrat, are co-sponsoring the “Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act.” The bipartisan bill requires outgoing lawmakers to close their campaign accounts within two years and also bans payments to family members once they leave office.

The veteran lawmakers said the bill is in direct response to a Tampa Bay Times / WTSP investigation that turned up about 100 so-called zombie campaigns, kept open by former politicians to finance their lifestyles, advance new careers and pay family members.

“Thanks to your reporting we understand the extent of some of the abuses,” Castor said. “A member shouldn’t be able to have these accounts live on for decades and use those funds for personal use – that’s wrong.”

The Times/WTSP investigation found former lawmakers and former candidates spending leftover donations on airline tickets, club memberships, a limo trip, cell phones, parking and new computers. Twenty former lawmakers were still spending leftover donations more than a decade after they left office.

Roughly half of the zombie campaigns were kept open by ex-lawmakers who went into lobbying. Under the new bill, they would be required to close their campaign accounts before starting in that industry.

But the bill does not address campaigns that continue spending even after the lawmaker dies. The investigation identified eight such campaigns where staffers authorized spending on lavish dinners, cell phone bills and rent checks.

Bilirakis said Castor and he will advocate support for the bill with their respective parties. But he expects some opposition.

“You’re going to get some resistance,” Bilirakis said. “Probably some former members of Congress will lobby against this bill.”

Under the proposed law, the two-year period to wind down a campaign would begin on the day after the deadline to qualify for the next election.

As with current law, unspent campaign donations could be given to charity, donated to local, state or national political parties or refunded to the original donor.

But it would prohibit candidates from transferring the money into their own political action committees, which is allowed under current regulations.

The bill would only apply to members of the U.S. House and Senate and not to presidential candidates.

The Times/WTSP investigation also led a Washington, D.C., watchdog group to petition the Federal Election Commission to specify which costs former lawmakers can pay with campaign donations. It also asks the agency to place a time limit on how long campaign accounts can...
remain open.

On March 21, the FEC began a 60-day public comment period. Commissioners are expected to review the proposal after that.

Contact Christopher O’Donnell at codonnell@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3446. Follow @codonnell_Times.
Jury says guilty this time

Bill Cosby’s first assault trial ended with a deadlocked jury. He now faces up to 10 years on each of three counts.

Tampa Bay Times

Published April 27, 2018

Who books 4,600 hotel nights?

Companis planning TV commercials in growing Hillsborough market.

Tampa Bay Times

Published April 27, 2018
Spending will get closer scrutiny

The targets, starting in July, are dormant campaigns that have hoarded money

By CHRISTOPHER O’DONNELL
Times Staff Writer

Published online April 26 and in print April 27.

The federal agency that oversees elections has announced a crackdown on former lawmakers who continue to spend leftover campaign donations long after leaving office.

The Federal Election Commission announced Wednesday that it will start scrutinizing the spending of what it called “dormant” campaigns — those maintained by former lawmakers who took advantage of a loophole that allowed them to hoard unspent campaign donations for years.

It comes after a Tampa Bay Times/10News WTSP investigation found that the agency ignored campaign finance reports showing more than 100 former politicians carried on spending donations even though they were no longer campaigning. In some cases, these zombie campaigns remained open for more than a decade.

“I think this is great, a really positive step the FEC is taking,” said Adav Noti, a former FEC attorney who is now a senior director for the Campaign Legal Center, a Washington D.C. watchdog group. “For them to do this in the middle of an election cycle is highly unusual.”

The extra scrutiny of former lawmakers’ spending will begin in July. It will apply to the campaigns of former U.S House candidates who did not campaign or hold office during the previous two years and to former U.S. Senate and presidential candidates who have been out of office and not campaigning for four years.

The move was approved in a closed-door meeting Tuesday by FEC commissioners, who had previously refused to comment on the Times/WTSP investigation, called “Zombie Campaigns.” The report detailed that former lawmakers and former candidates spent leftover donations on airline tickets, club memberships, a limo trip, cell phones, parking and new computers. Six campaign finance experts said that and other spending identified by the Times/WTSP were potential election law violations. In a few cases, spending continued after the lawmaker had died.

FEC vice chairwoman Ellen Weintraub, a Democratic appointee, said the Times/WTSP report highlighted a problem that was not on the FEC’s radar. The need for action was supported by all four of the agency’s commissioners, she said.

“It was encouraging that the entire Commission saw this as a problem that needs to be addressed and agreed on a course of action that would be a good first step,” she said.

“I’ve always been concerned about the potential for personal use and advo-
cated for strengthening those prohibitions.”

It’s unclear how effective the new FEC policy will be, however.

The agency, which has 33 analysts, is not planning to add more staff to help with the additional work, a spokeswoman said. Last year, the agency was responsible for reviewing some 26 million financial transactions. That number will rise this year with U.S. House and Senate races across the county.

In the past, when spending by former politicians has been questioned, little if any action resulted. In eight cases identified by the Times/WTSP, campaigns were asked for more information, sent the FEC paperwork stating they were not running for office, then continued spending.

The new oversight also stops short of the legal changes watchdog groups and two veteran Tampa Bay federal lawmakers say are needed to deter ex-politicians from hoarding and spending campaign funds.

Rep. Gus Bilirakis, the Palm Harbor Republican, and Rep. Kathy Castor, the Tampa Democrat, are co-sponsoring the “Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act.” The bipartisan bill requires outgoing lawmakers to close their campaign accounts within two years and also bans payments to family members once they leave office.

“I think it’s positive the FEC is going to shine a light on this and review these campaigns but it’s no substitute for our bipartisan bill,” Castor said. “The FEC is just requesting a review – our bill would terminate those zombie campaigns after an election cycle. They need that.”

In addition, the Campaign Legal Center petitioned the FEC in February to introduce stricter rules for how former lawmakers spend leftover campaign money. A 60-day public comment period on the petition ends May 21.

“Some commissioners may now say we’ve already stepped up enforcement in this area so we don’t need to strengthen the rules,” Noti said. “That would be disappointing and concerning.”

Based on the most recent campaign filings, there will be no shortage of spending for FEC analysts to question.

Congressman Bud Cramer, R-Ala., reported spending more than $1,800 on Feb. 7 on a “fundraising expense” at The Source, a pricey Wolfgang Puck restaurant in Washington DC. But Cramer, who left office in 2009 and went into lobbying, did not report any fundraising receipts in the first quarter and has not filed paperwork to run for office. Candidates are prohibited from most fundraising activities when they have not declared for an office. He could not be reached for comment.

Former Congressman Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., has continued paying his wife $1,000 per month to file his quarterly FEC report, his latest filing shows. More than five years after he left office, campaign funds covered nearly $200 in “internet/wifi” expenses in January and February.

And former South Carolina Democratic congressman Robin Tallon, who has kept his campaign account open for 25 years, paid $1,000 to his son for filing a 15-page handwritten report to the FEC.

Other ex-lawmakers’ campaigns have changed their spending habits in the wake of the Times/WTSP report.

Dylan Beesley, a former campaign adviser who took over as treasurer of the campaign of deceased Congressman Mark Takai, paid himself more than $100,000 over a 17-month period for “consulting” after Takai’s 2016 death. That led to a watchdog group filing a complaint against him with the FEC.

In the first quarter of 2018, however, he paid himself just $1,500, roughly $5,000 less than in the first quarter of 2017.

WTSP reporter Noah Pransky and Times data reporter Connie Humburg contributed to this report. Contact Christopher O’Donnell at codonnell@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3446. Follow @codonnell_Times.
Zombie cash still flows

Federal scrutiny of ex-office holders’ campaign funds won’t begin till 2019.

Rain or shine...

The Rudder weather center provides key data that affects millions.

Amid scandals, Catholics consider cutting donations

Parishioners are upping their financial support for their churches and causes.
Four months ago, the federal agency that oversees elections announced that it would finally begin cracking down on former lawmakers who hoard and spend leftover campaign donations long after they leave office.

That didn’t seem to make a difference to some former congressmen.

Former Florida Rep. Cliff Stearns, a Republican who lost his seat in 2012, dipped into campaign donations to pay for internet service and continued paying a $1,000 monthly salary to his wife in the weeks following the announcement.

And former California congressman Gary Miller added another $2,400 in salary to the almost $82,000 he had already paid his wife since leaving office in 2015. He also paid rent on office space and the tab for several meals at a Claremont eatery, Kick Back Jack’s.

It turns out Stearns and Miller had little reason to worry.

The Federal Election Commission acknowledged last week that it actually won’t begin scrutinizing the spending of former office holders until 2019.

FEC spokeswoman Judith Ingram said that was always the timetable agreed by commissioners in a closed-room session in April, but that the agency had accidentally announced the wrong start date.

That is an unnecessary delay, said Adav Noti, a former FEC attorney who is now a senior director for the Campaign Legal Center, a Washington D.C. watchdog group. Ex-lawmakers have been given plenty of notice, he said.

“I don’t see any reason why the FEC needs to wait another six months to begin doing what it should have been doing all along,” Noti said.

The FEC’s crackdown was announced after a Tampa Bay Times/10News WTSP investigation, called Zombie Campaigns, found that the agency ignored campaign finance reports showing more than 100 former politicians carried on spending donations even though they were no longer campaigning. In some cases, these campaigns remained open for more than a decade.

Retired lawmakers and former candidates spent leftover donations on airline tickets, club memberships, a limo trip, cell phones, parking and new computers, reporters found.

It’s unclear if the new guidelines unveiled by the FEC would curb such spending. They apply to the campaigns of former U.S House candidates who did not campaign or hold office during the previous two years and to former U.S Senate and presidential candidates who have been out of office and not campaigning for four years.

FEC analysts have been instructed to look for spending on rent, utility payments, telephones, spending on meals, club memberships and concert and sporting event tickets, among other items.

But Noti and two veteran Tampa Bay federal lawmakers say the new oversight stops short of the legal changes that are needed to curtail the misuse of campaign funds highlighted by the Times/WTSP report.

The Campaign Legal Center is still waiting for the FEC to act on a petition it filed in February calling for the FEC to specify what costs former lawmakers can expense with campaign funds.

By Christopher O’Donnell and Connie Humburg
Times Staff Writers
donations and to place a time limit on how long campaign accounts can remain open. A 60-day public comment period on the petition ended May 21.

And in April, Rep. Gus Bilirakis, the Palm Harbor Republican, and Rep. Kathy Castor, the Tampa Democrat, cosponsored a bill that requires outgoing lawmakers to close their campaign accounts within two years and also bans payments to family members once they leave office.

But the bill, which was co-sponsored by Colorado Republican Congressman Mike Coffman, seems to have stalled.

“Unfortunately, it’s going to be an uphill battle,” said Castor, who plans to push the bill again if the Democrats win control of the House of Representatives in the upcoming midterm elections. “People are very fed up with this climate of corruption.”

Stearns, who has spent $143,000 so far this year, still has $1.5 million in unspent political donations. He did not respond to a voicemail on his cell-phone seeking comment.

Miller still has $293,000 in unused donations. A call to his business office was not returned.

Still, with the threat of extra scrutiny, some ex-lawmakers have begun changing their behavior.

Former Florida senator George LeMieux was a focus of the Times/WTSP investigation for spending on events and paying more than $40,000 to a political campaign consultant even though he wasn’t campaigning. In February, he converted his campaign account into a political action committee called the Florida Freedom Committee, a move that allows him to make unlimited donations to political parties and other political committees.

And former South Carolina Democrat Robin Tallon seems to have curbed some of his post-retirement campaign spending, which previously included thousands of dollars on computers and tens of thousands of dollars on unexplained “reimbursements.”

After paying more than $22,000 to his son, Robert Tallon III, to file campaign reports over more than a decade, Tallon appointed a new treasurer in July.

Still, a quarter century after leaving office in 1993, he has more than $1 million remaining in his still-open campaign account.

Contact Christopher O’Donnell at codonnell@tampabay.com Follow @codonnell_Times.
Interactive database

See how the 102 'ZOMBIE' politicians spent their money

Online only:
tampabay.com/zombiedatabase

Published online January 31, 2018
Supplemental material
ZOMBIE CAMPAIGNS
The campaign is over. The candidate might be dead. But the spending never stops.
Reddit: Top-Ranked Journalist AMA of All-Time

I AM A... ASK ME ANYTHING

posts

Journalist: We're the reporters who found 100+ former politicians' campaign accounts spending campaign donations years after the campaign was over — sometimes, even when the politician was dead. AUA
$ 53,045 points • 1,681 comments submitted 4 months ago by elimurray ELI MURRAY to r/IAmA

Our short bio: We’re Chris O’Donnell, Eli Murray, Connie Humburg and Noah Pransky, reporters for the Tampa Bay Times and 10News/WTSP. We’ve spent just short of a year investigating ‘zombie campaigns’: political
accounts that accept and spend donors’ money for years after the campaign was over. You’ll find more...

Journalist: I am Julian Assange founder of WikiLeaks -- Ask Me Anything
$ 48,297 points • 14,701 comments submitted 1 year ago by _JulianAssange WIKILEAKS to r/IAmA

I am Julian Assange, founder, publisher and editor of WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks has been publishing now for ten years. We have had many battles. In February the UN ruled that I had been unlawfully detained, without
more...

Journalist: We are the investigative journalists who worked on the Panama Papers AMA!
$ 41,157 points • 2,970 comments submitted 2 years ago by SZ_investigativ to r/IAmA
Want to drain the swamp? We found a good place to start – dead and retired candidates still “campaigning.”

10 Investigates and the Tampa Bay Times teamed up to identify dozens of former Congressional campaigns now financing the lifestyles of politicians, their families, and their former associates…and nobody in Washington seemed to notice...until we did:

www.zombiecampaigns.com
With a tip of the cap to the 1970s cult icon, "Schoolhouse Rock!," 10Investigates and the Tampa Bay Times bring you a new lesson from the Capitol: how to abuse campaign finance loophole.

Catch our groundbreaking investigative project: zombiecampaigns.com
THE CANDIDATES ARE NO LONGER RUNNING — SOME ARE DEAD — BUT THEIR CAMPAIGNS KEEP GOING. AND KEEP SPENDING.

BY CHRISTOPHER O’DONNELL, KLI MURRAY, CONNIE HUMBERG AND NOAH FRANSEY | TIMES/10News WTSP Staff Writers

WASHINGTON D.C.

It's been more than a decade since South Florida Rep. Mark Foley was forced out of Congress for sending sexually explicit text messages to teenage boys.

But Foley tapped his congressional campaign fund to dine on the Palm Beach social circuit four times in early 2007, ending with a $400 tab at the Forum Club of the Palm Beaches, the Tampa Bay Times, 10News WTSP and YRGA-owned TV stations found.

Their spending makes a mockery of one of the fundamental principles of America’s campaign finance laws.

Donations must be spent only on political or politicians’ personal lives.

Times/10News reporters analyzed more than 1 million records detailing the spending of former U.S. lawmakers and federal candidates. They found roughly 100 of these zombie campaigns.

SEE HOW 102 ZOMBIES SPENT THEIR MONEY

Download the full database of zombie campaign accounts identified by the Times/10News WTSP at tampabay.com/zombiedatabase

‘ZOMBIE ACCOUNTS OF CAPITOL HILL’

Watch 10News WTSP's zombie campaign video at tampabay.com/zombiecampaigns
Spending will get closer scrutiny

The targets, starting in July, are dormant campaigns that have hoarded money.

BY CHRISTOPHER O'DONNELL
Times Staff Writer

The federal agency that oversees elections has announced a crackdown on former lawmakers who continue to spend leftover campaign donations long after leaving office.

The Federal Election Commission announced Wednesday that it will start scrutinizing the spending of what it called “dormant” campaigns, those maintained by former lawmakers who took advantage of a loophole that allowed them to hoard unspent campaign donations for years.

It comes after a Tampa Bay Times/10News WTVT investigation found that the agency ignored campaign finance reports showing that more than 100 former politicians carried on spending donations though they were no longer campaigning. In some cases, these zombie campaigns remained open for more than a decade.

"Zombie Campaigns" an investigation by the Tampa Bay Times, 10News WTVT and TEGNA-owned TV stations, found roughly 100 cases when campaign spending continued long after an official left office. The "zombie campaign" rap through more than $30 million since 1996, reports found. What did the money pay for? High-priced legal fees and more money in January after a complaint to the Federal Election Commission.

Not even deaths stop the spending. The reports found eight campaigns that kept seeking checks after the candidate died. Other lawmakers who targeted new sources as lobbyists used their leftover money to benefit their lobbying clients. And one watchdog: "It's the kind of spend that gets away with being anything but transparent."
Other reporting inspired by our findings

**Newsday**

Zombie campaign accounts live on

So what’s the status of the committees of other former members?

**HUFFPOST**

7 Candidates-Turned-Trump Cabinet Members Continue Spending Campaign Funds

**Bloomberg Government**

Kill the Zombies? FEC Mulls What to Do About Undead Campaigns

**Orlando Sentinel**

Commentary: ‘Zombie’ attack: Campaigns are dead, but still spending money

How Lax Regulations Make It Easy For Politicians To Run ‘Zombie’ Campaigns

February 5, 2018 - 4:21 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered
May 21, 2018

The Honorable Caroline C. Hunter  
Commissioner  
U.S. Federal Election Commission  
1050 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20463  

RE: Support for FEC Rulemaking over use of remaining campaign funds

Dear Commissioner Hunter,

I respectfully write to comment on REG 2018-01, the Federal Election Commission’s notice of availability regarding former candidates’ personal use of campaign funds. I support the Commission proceeding with a rulemaking on this important topic.

Reporting by Florida’s Tampa Bay Times and WTSP-TV (see attached) indicate that many former officeholders have continued using their campaign funds to pay a variety of expenses for years after leaving office.

In response to this abuse of power, I introduced the Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act. This bill requires outgoing lawmakers to close their campaign accounts within two years and also bans payments to family members once they leave office.

I believe the Commission should clarify the permissible and impermissible uses of campaign funds after a person is no longer running for office. Doing so would help prevent some of the most problematic spending and provide needed clarity to former officeholders.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I look forward to continuing to support you in your all-important mission. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me or my Legislative Assistant, Didier Barjon at 202-225-3376.

Sincerely,

Kathy Castor  
U.S. Representative  
Florida – District 14
June 25, 2018

The Honorable Gregg Harper  
Chairman  
Committee on House Administration  
1309 Longworth  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Chairman  
Committee on Judiciary  
2138 Rayburn  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Brady  
Ranking Member  
Committee on House Administration  
1309 Longworth  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Nadler  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Judiciary  
2138 Rayburn  
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Hold a hearing on H.R. 5409, Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act

Dear Chairman Harper, Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Brady and Ranking Member Nadler:

We write to you to follow-up on our requests for a hearing on our bill H.R. 5409, Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act. H.R. 5409. It requires former lawmakers to close campaign accounts in a reasonable time and bars unauthorized payments to family members. Our bill also requires that former lawmakers dispense all campaign funds prior to becoming a registered lobbyist. A member should not be able to have these accounts live on for decades or use them for personal gain.

Currently, there is no limit on how long an ex-lawmaker can hold onto a campaign account. This bill has bipartisan support with additional support from advocacy groups who witness the abuse of campaign funds first hand. Tampa Bay Times/WTSP reporters analyzed more than one million records detailing the spending of former U.S. lawmakers and federal candidates. They found roughly 100 of these “zombie campaigns,” still spending even though their candidate’s political career had ended. Former members should not be able to have these accounts live on for decades and use those funds for personal use – that is wrong – and we must work together to end this pervasive practice.

Former members should not be able to have these accounts live on for decades and use those funds for personal use – that is wrong – and we must work together to end this pervasive practice.

Thank you in advance for your help to advance the Honest Elections and Campaign, No Gain Act this summer.

Sincerely,

Kathy Casto  
Member of Congress

Gus Bilirakis  
Member of Congress
2019 duPont-Columbia Award

Honored with a Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award
for Zombie Campaigns, an investigative news partnership with The Tampa Bay Times

2018 Int’l Data Journalism Awards

Shortlisted – Top Investigation

The Startup Lisboa award for investigation of the year
Shortlisted projects

The Gerrymandering Project, FiveThirtyEight, United States
Monitor da Violencia, G1, Brazil
Paradise Papers, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, United States
Reporting Deaths In Malaysian Police Custody: Behind the Numbers, Malaysiakini, Malaysia
Zombie Campaigns, Tampa Bay Times and WTSP, United States
Easy Money, The Globe and Mail, Canada
Bussed Out: How America moves its homeless, The Guardian US, United States

2018 Suncoast Emmy Awards

Winner – Investigative Series