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Crist fights for conservative title

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When former House Speaker Marco Rubio jumped into the race for the U.S. Senate against Gov. Charlie Crist, he was immediately tabbed as the more conservative candidate by political reporters like myself.

But Crist, who has become popular in part by playing to a more moderate audience, is far from handing over the title without a fight as he and Rubio prepare for their 2010 primary battle.

In each endorsement Crist publicizes these days, he has been playing up comments from Republicans proclaiming him to be a true conservative. This despite Rubio winning endorsements from Republican executive committees in Lee and Pasco counties recently.

It happened earlier today when Crist picked up an endorsement from Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez.

In a press release announcing the endorsement Alvarez calls Crist a conservative twice in just a few sentences.

"Governor Crist has demonstrated his commitment to conservative values that hold government accountable and keep more money in the pockets of hardworking Floridians. He is the common-sense conservative leader we need in Washington, and I am proud to lend my help to his campaign," Alvarez said.

And just before I went on vacation last week, Crist responded to a string of Marco Rubio endorsements, including from U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Chumuckla, with a big one of his own: former U.S. Sen. Connie Mack, a Republican who now lives in Charlotte County.

"Charlie Crist is a life long, common sense conservative who shares my belief that less taxing, less spending, and less government, equals more freedom. That's why the CATO Institute ranked him as the most fiscally conservative governor in America," Mack stated.

Rubio and Crist are not the only two candidates in the race. Former New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith, who lives in Sarasota, also has filed to run. Smith, like Rubio, is running as a more conservative choice over Crist.

Crist has frustrated some conservatives on several issues. He has aggressively fought for climate change legislation, restored voting rights for felons against the objections of

Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum, and helped promote President Barack Obama's federal stimulus bill.
