Romney's Next Problem: Donor Apathy

By *Tim Sprinkle* | *The Exchange* – 4 hours ago

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As if Gov. Mitt Romney didn't have enough on his plate heading into this evening's presidential debate in Denver, now there are whispers that Republican donors are ready to give up on the White House race -- and Romney -- and shift their money to more winnable House and Senate contests.

For a candidate with more than $50 million in his campaign coffers right now, after raising a total of $279 million, this isn't the end of the world for the Republican ticket. But it's the "we give up" message that this shift could send to the Obama camp, and voters in general, that may prove problematic to the Romney-Ryan campaign.

"The money always goes where it thinks it can get some kind of return, and the return on the presidential race for Republican money does not look auspicious right now," says former Congressman Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.). "So they'll be looking for other places to spend it. Probably if the [weeks ahead go] totally sour, there will be a lot more money invested in House races to try and protect that that majority."

Frenzel doesn't expect the big Republican donors to give up on the conservative ticket altogether, but he wouldn't be surprised to see more corporate donors shifting money to the Democratic side if the campaign doesn't start to turn around soon. "The big donors and super PACs are pretty committed folks," he says, "but the corporate PACs will always try to follow a winner."

Doug Jaraczewski, president of The Campaign Finance Group, a Washington D.C.-based campaign fundraising consultancy, agrees, saying that he's heard all along that the GOP's primary concern this year is maintaining control of the House. For now, Republicans hold 240 of the 435 House seats.

"If Romney doesn't make a move soon, I see GOP lobbyists and donors focusing exclusively on the Congress, as that's their real bread and butter," he says.

Picking up the White House, he says, is "a secondary goal."