

Bluffton Today

Patrick, McCoy take aim at Sanford 'Apology Tour'

By Chris Kardish February 19, 2013

State representative and congressional aspirant Andy Patrick injected a dose of cynicism into former Gov. Mark Sanford's media campaign for the 1st District seat Tuesday.

Patrick, R-Hilton Head Island, joined Charleston-area state Rep. Peter McCoy in questioning Sanford's recent attempts at redemption in a 30-second TV spot and a Today Show appearance. The ad showed an apologetic Sanford appealing to the "God of second chances" three and a half years after a six-day disappearance and the revelation of an extramarital affair derailed his political career.

"I've experienced how none of us go through life without mistakes," he said in the ad. "But in their wake we can learn a lot about grace, a God of second chances, and be the better for it."

Mike Biundo, a top Patrick consultant who ran Rick Santorum's 2012 presidential bid, issued a rebuke.

"Andy Patrick is a Christian man and believes in repentance," Biundo said. "But he also believes past is prologue. Governor Sanford displayed a sad dereliction of duty in abandoning the people of the entire state of South Carolina, and his personal tour of redemption now is a disservice to the people of the Lowcountry who are looking for the next leader to represent them in Congress."

Sanford has campaigned hard as a proven fiscal conservative who made a grave error, emphasizing top honors from conservative institutions such as the Cato Institute and the National Taxpayers Union, which recognized him as the most fiscally conservative member of Congress when he held a differently drawn 1st District from 1995 to 2000.

He continued pressing this point in a Today Show interview with Savannah Guthrie on Tuesday, when he again acknowledged past mistakes while insisting his record with taxpayers remains unblemished.

“But one place I didn’t ever fail was with the taxpayer,” he said. “If you were to look at my 20 years in politics, what you’d see is a fairly remarkable consistency of trying to look out for the taxpayer.”

But Guthrie brought up his record-setting \$74,000 in ethics fines stemming from an Associated Press investigation after news of the affair surfaced. The 2010 fine included reimbursement for higher-class airfare, personal use of state-owned aircraft, personal use of campaign contributions and Ethics Commission fees.

Stanford countered that his no-contest plea of the 37 charges came without an admission of guilt. Lawmakers used the violations to support a formal rebuke, but impeachment proceedings failed in committee.

“If we were to get into the nitty gritty, what you’d find is that there was no admission of guilt with any of that,” he said. “In the same way that a business will settle a case...you can say ‘OK, this happened, but by no means do we agree with what happened.’”

McCoy, however, didn’t accept Sanford’s explanation and blasted him on Twitter twice. In response to Sanford’s assertion that he “didn’t ever fail the taxpayer,” McCoy said, “Guess stealing from them doesn’t count.”

McCoy is one of 16 Republicans vying for the GOP-leaning coastal district that includes most of Beaufort County.

Rival candidates have mostly kept public references to Sanford's infidelity at least partially veiled so far in the short sprint to the March 19 primary that will likely yield a runoff April 2.

Although Sanford is widely considered a frontrunner because of name recognition and resources, some political observers have argued he’d be vulnerable in a runoff because many voters who didn’t get their first choice in the glutted field would back his opponent.