

## As Mark Sanford falls on sword

By Michael Graham | Friday, June 26, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Op-Ed

“Who is this guy?”

That was my recurring thought watching Gov. Mark Sanford’s slo-mo train wreck of a press conference on Wednesday.

I know Mark Sanford from my days as a GOP political consultant in South Carolina. I introduced him at a speech to the libertarian Cato Institute before he became governor.

Mark Sanford was smooth. He was smart. Above all, Mark Sanford was cool. In many ways, he was the Republican Barack Obama. Sanford is a true small-government conservative, an ideology that, like Obama’s MoveOn.org liberalism, isn’t very popular. But like Obama, Mark Sanford had the political skills to get voters past his policies and give him their votes.

That’s the Mark Sanford I knew.

So who was that stumbling, bumbling, embarrassing klutz giving the most cringe-inducing press conference in recent memory? It was so painful that I half expected Larry “I Am Not Gay” Craig to step in and go, “Mark, maybe you should let me take over . . .”

I’ve seen Sanford discussing the ideological underpinnings of school choice with academics one day, and the attributes of the ideal hunting dog sitting in a pickup the next. The guy who could make anyone feel comfy around him was on TV making an entire nation feel icky.

What happened?

Was this the Clintonesque cheater finally caught with his pants - or as they say in Buenos Aires, “pantalones” - down? Is Sanford yet another arrogant pol in the tradition of Gary Hart and John Edwards, who thought he could get away with it?

No. His story is more tragic. He’s not a preacher who fell from grace. He’s a man who fell in love.

How else to explain the sheer idiocy of his behavior? Cheaters have workarounds; they know how to get the Hooters girl in and out of the state trooper’s car without being seen. John Edwards-types slip into the hotel through the basement.

Sanford would have none of it. In counseling with his wife, kicked out of this house, he followed his heart which led him to Argentina.

Once caught, he didn’t deny or defuse. Instead, he talked until his aides threw themselves on the mics.

Through it all, he maintained his earnestness. That’s why it was so painful. We were watching a man trying to do the wrong thing the right way.

Just read his e-mails - e-mails sent from his farm, by the way, that somehow made their way anonymously to the local paper months ago. They are the writings of a man trapped in the “hopelessly impossible situation of love” - between his duty to his family and his love for another woman.

That doesn’t excuse Sanford’s faithlessness, as Sanford himself reminded us again and again with his ever-more abject apologies. But Sanford’s not looking for an excuse. He’s looking for an escape.

The punditocracy agrees that Sanford’s performance was a disaster. What they’re missing is that it was supposed to be. I believe it was an act of political suicide, destroying one life so he can begin another.

Which is why it was also oddly compelling. Instead of political posturing, Sanford gave a messy display of naked humanity. As his ex-spokesman Will Folks said, “It wasn’t pretty, advisable, or particularly eloquent - but it was also probably one of the most authentic things you’ll ever see in American politics.”

There is an acute shortage of authenticity here in the Age of Obama. There are people so hungry for it that I believe they would look past this and support Sanford one day in the future.

But I don’t believe they’ll ever get that chance.

**Article URL:** [http://www.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/op\\_ed/view.bg?articleid=1181357](http://www.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/op_ed/view.bg?articleid=1181357)

**Related Articles:**

---

**World leaders pressure Honduras to reverse coup**

</news/international/americas/view.bg?articleid=1181976>

**Spiritual adviser: 'Darkness' gripped Mark Sanford**

</news/national/south/view.bg?articleid=1181923>

**South Carolina gov considered resigning after sex scandal**

[/news/us\\_politics/view.bg?articleid=1181875](/news/us_politics/view.bg?articleid=1181875)



[Contact us](#) | [Print advertising](#) | [Online advertising](#) | [Herald history](#) | [News tips](#) | [Electronic edition](#) | [Browser upgrade](#) | [Home delivery](#) | [Herald wireless](#)

**Save on Boston Herald Home Delivery**

[Jobs with Herald Media](#)

For back copy information and more information on other collectible copies please call 617-426-3000 Ext. 7714. [Click here for Celtics, Patriots and Red Sox back copies](#)



© Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Media.

No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)