

Mark Sanford: Taxpayers' Choice for Congress

By: Deroy Murdock – March 29, 2013

In the fortnight between the March 19 Republican primary and the Tuesday, April 2, runoff in South Carolina's first congressional district, America will have drilled itself some \$38 billion deeper in debt. As the \$16.75 trillion national debt burrows ever downward into a deeper abyss, it's a time for choosing on the Palmetto State's coast. GOP voters soon will pick between attorney and former Marine Curtis Bostic and former two-term governor and three-term House member Mark Sanford. The choice for taxpayers today and tomorrow is Sanford.

Washington's finances threaten to bury this republic. Meanwhile, the congressional GOP leadership seems unsteady about how to address this impending crisis and its chief catalyst, Obama. Sanford is precisely what the Republican conference badly needs: a proven, energetic, and brave fiscal conservative who will confront Obama, while also bucking up House speaker John Boehner and majority leader Eric Cantor when they go wobbly.

Sanford and Bostic are yin and yang, in some respects. Sanford is working to overcome voters' memories of the dramatic, self-imposed collapse of his marriage. Bostic is a happily married family man whose campaign materials feature him with his wife and smiling kids.

Sanford and Bostic contrast, as well, on the fiscal mess that pushes America ever closer to a Cypriot-style day of reckoning.

In their debate this past Thursday, March 28, Bostic criticized Sanford for serving in Congress as a "Mr. No" who reliably rejected new programs, fresh spending, and higher taxes. Bostic told the Charleston audience, "We have to do more than just saying 'no.'"

The crowd roared when Sanford replied, "We also need to do more than say 'yes.'"

While Bostic said he would scrap the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Labor Relations Board, and the Environmental Protection Agency, he disappointed conservatives by saying he would take the savings from these agencies' budgets and spend them on "more essential" items rather than on tax cuts or debt reduction.

Jonathan Bydlak, president of the Coalition to Reduce Spending (on whose advisory board I serve), is pleased that Sanford signed the group's Reject the Debt pledge. On March 8, Sanford promised in writing to "consider all spending open for reduction and vote only for budgets that present a path to balance; and . . . vote against any appropriations bill that increases total spending and against authorization or funding of new programs without offsetting cuts in other programs."

Bydlak is still waiting for Bostic to sign this pledge.

“Bostic was one of only two Republicans out of the field of 16 who did not sign the pledge,” Bydlak tells me. “Fourteen others signed, as did one of the two Democrats.” Bydlak adds: “If you’re a voter who cares more about Sanford’s pants than the precarious fiscal state of the Republic, then Bostic’s probably your guy. He refuses to come out in favor of simple, prudent measures to set the country on a sustainable path. He’s a conservative when courting votes but won’t pledge to vote like one when in Congress. Non-committal candidates like these are what’s killing the Republican party. This race has been a great example of why it’s so critical to pin candidates down on their promises.”

As much he tarnished himself in his private life, Sanford has a sterling public record on limited government and fiscal prudence. The National Taxpayer’s Union and Citizens Against Government Waste both ranked him No. 1 in Congress for fighting to lower taxes and spending. The Cato Institute ranked him as America’s most fiscally conservative governor, in part for eliminating some \$1 billion of South Carolina’s red ink. He also cut waiting times at the Department of Motor Vehicles from 66 minutes to 15, showing that lower spending and better services are not mutually exclusive.

Sanford hopes to return this energetic, reformist approach to Washington. This afternoon, I asked Sanford, “What would be the three most significant and specific limited-government initiatives that you would pursue if elected again to the House?”

He replied:

1. Entitlement reform. Entitlements are the ticking time bomb in the budget, and unless we get our arms around them, it’ll bankrupt the country.
2. Work to eliminate or defund ObamaCare, and replace it with a further repeal of mandates and regulations that keep the cost of healthcare high. Think about it: Every time the government tries to regulate healthcare and make it more affordable, it gets more expensive. We have to go in the opposite direction.
3. Congress must reclaim regulatory authority from the bureaucracies, starting specifically with the repeal of funding for the National Labor Relations Board, along the lines of Senator Roy Blunt’s S. 188. Also, require sunset provisions, regulatory review, and cost-benefit analysis on all new regulations passed.

Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky regularly shows what one man can do to shake up a legislative body — and he’s in the minority of his house.

With a half-dozen years of experience on the Hill already behind him, Sanford is poised to bring a similar level of discipline, principle, and focus to the House. As America careens toward economic ruin, Republican voters in South Carolina’s first district should nominate Mark Sanford as their emissary to stop the fiscal madness.