

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

The Sanford-Bostic Showdown in South Carolina

By Jim Geraght April 2, 2013

Yesterday's Jolt offered my take on the GOP House runoff between Mark Sanford, the former governor infamous for his "Appalachian Trail" hike, and former Charleston County council member Curtis Bostic.

I spent last week in Hilton Head, which is in South Carolina's First Congressional District; polls opened a half-hour ago, and close at 7 p.m. tonight.

(Put aside your worries of Democratic mischief-making; if you voted in the Democratic primary two weeks ago, you're not allowed to vote in the Republican runoff.)

The Sanford campaign ran an ad in Sunday's Island Packet – a lengthy thanks to the district for the honor of asking for their vote, a reminder of the Cato Institute's praise of his fiscally conservative ways, and oh yes, a rather large photo of Sanford and his sons – a not-too-subtle reminder that, "Hey, I've tried to put things right with my family as best I can."

I've chatted with a couple of active Republican and Tea Party activists down here. If Sanford is the nominee, a certain number of Republicans won't vote for him, citing the 2009 scandal and sense that Sanford embarrassed the state by traveling to Argentina and not telling anyone. (The affair is considered much less of an issue than his leaving the state under false pretenses.) Very few of those folks feel strongly enough about Sanford to vote for Elizabeth-Colbert-Bush; they'll just stay home.

Of course, if Bostic is the nominee, a certain number of Republicans will stay home as well. No doubt, Bostic has two key bases of support in evangelical Christians and home schoolers. As one Beaufort County resident put it to me, "I'm hearing folks saying, 'my preacher says I should vote for him.'" The problem is breaking beyond that base, and branching out support beyond the Charleston suburbs into Beaufort County, into the retiree-heavy precincts along Route 278 and on Hilton Head Island. Bostic's candidacy is pretty clearly built around his religious identity – he's described himself as a Creationist – and that's not quite the brand of conservatism that traditionally sells in this district. If last week's Public

Policy Polling survey is to be believed, it's almost a wash when it comes to which candidate can unify the party: "Sanford (76%) and Bostic (72%) are both earning less than 80% of the GOP vote."

The smart money is on Sanford winning, although Bostic could keep it close. PPP has Sanford ahead 53 percent to 40 percent, as of a week ago. The former governor starts with a base of about 20,000 votes who voted for him in the initial primary; almost all of those voters can be counted on to show up Tuesday, while Bostic starts from a base of about 7,000. There are about 22,000 Republicans who voted for some other candidate in the primary.

The DCCC is going to dump a ton of effort into this race either way (although not necessarily money, as they'll probably bet that Elizabeth Colbert-Busch will be able to raise money through her famous brother's endorsement). If they win, or even if it's close, they can brag that they've managed to win a House race in South Carolina. Republican activists are a little nervous down here; they know that while this is a Republican district, it is one where Obama took about 40 percent of the vote in 2012. Normally, the lower -turnout special election should benefit the Republican. But with Colbert talking up his sister, and perhaps the national spotlight on a potential Sanford comeback, turnout could be considerably higher.

Of course, if Elizabeth Colbert-Busch's brother had never made it big, no one would be arguing she belongs in the U.S. Congress. Her bio page features three pictures of her brother and four of her.