

# The New York Times

## Former Governor Advances in South Carolina Race

By: Kim Severson – March 19, 2013

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The first chapter in a wild race to fill a Congressional seat in South Carolina was written Tuesday when former Gov. Mark Sanford staged something of a comeback in a Republican field crowded with 16 candidates, and Democrats overwhelmingly picked Elizabeth Colbert Busch, a businesswoman on leave from Clemson University.

Mrs. Colbert Busch is a sister of the comedian Stephen Colbert, a burst of celebrity in a race with other marquee names. Chief among them for the Republicans was Mr. Sanford, 52, the former governor who turned the special election into a stage for his political comeback after his fictitious walk along the Appalachian Trail led to a divorce, ethics charges and censure.

By the time the polls closed in the district, which stretches along the coastal Low Country and includes Charleston, it was clear Mr. Sanford had at least some political redemption. With 99 percent of the votes counted, he got 37 percent of them.

But because he did not get more than 50 percent, he will have to stand in a runoff before he can hope to face the Democrat on May 7.

In a close race for second among the Republicans that will prompt a recount, Curtis Bostic, a former member of the Charleston County Council, had 13 percent of the vote, while Larry Grooms, a state senator, had 12 percent.

Teddy Turner, a political newcomer and the son of the media mogul Ted Turner, finished fourth, with 8 percent.

Mrs. Colbert Busch, 58, easily beat Ben Frasier, who has run for office in almost every election cycle since 1972. She won 96 percent of the vote.

Voting was light, and 15 percent of 453,632 registered voters registered in the newly drawn district went to the polls.

The election was also the first major test of the state's new voter identification law, which requires voters to produce driver's licenses, passports or other forms of state-approved voter photo ID cards. Because of that, the United States Justice Department was monitoring the election to ensure compliance with the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Over the longer term, the primary for the First Congressional District will set the stage for what many thought impossible: a chance for a conservative district in a very red state to send a Democrat to Congress.

In December, Senator Jim DeMint stepped down to take over the Heritage Foundation, and Gov. Nikki R. Haley appointed Representative Tim Scott to the post, making Mr. Scott the Senate's only black member. That appointment opened up the Congressional seat, which Mr. Sanford held in the 1990s.

Mr. Sanford, who left the governorship in 2011 and had spent the time since regrouping after a divorce and his painful last year in office, said in an interview that he viewed the timing as something of a miracle that came just as he was contemplating his next move.

His strategy, in ads and interviews, had been to first ask for forgiveness for leaving his office unattended for six days as he pursued a woman in Argentina who is now his fiancée. He lied about it, saying he was hiking the Appalachian Trail. Although he finished his term, he faced ethics fines, censure by his party and a divorce from his wife of 21 years, Jenny.

His first ad spoke of finding grace and the god of second chances. His second ad quickly left that theme behind, and hammered home his conservative qualifications, which included being rated by the Cato Institute, a libertarian group, as the most fiscally conservative governor during his tenure.

Tuesday's vote offered some indication of how far forgiveness and fiscal conservatism will go in a part of South Carolina that is Republican, certainly, but populated by relative newcomers (by South Carolina standards) and is more moderate than other parts of the state.

"Repentance works better in the South Carolina Upcountry, where it's more evangelical," said Jack Bass, who has written several books about civil rights, the state's politics and Strom Thurmond, the long-serving senator.

"This is a moderate district," he said. "It's the only South Carolina Congressional district that went for Romney in the primary."

Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, won the 2012 primary by 12 points, blocking what at the time seemed an inevitable and easy walk to the presidential nomination for Mitt Romney.

This season, 15 other Republicans in the race with Mr. Sanford have had to run hard in a short period of time to differentiate themselves. The candidates spent six weeks attacking one another and targeting Mr. Sanford, with candidates striking notes for their own fiscal conservatism, as well as their own strong families and conservative social and religious values.

With so many candidates in the race, winning boiled down to name recognition, said Chip Felkel, a Republican political consultant based in Greenville, S.C., who is not affiliated with any campaign.

By April, voters and Republican strategists will have to decide if Mr. Sanford will be the strongest candidate to send into battle against Mrs. Colbert Busch, who will be able to build up her campaign funds while the two Republicans fight each other.

Democratic strategists believe that in the May general election Mrs. Colbert Busch could peel off female Republican voters faced with having to choose Mr. Sanford or cross party lines.