

Five hundred more days?

The drive to replace South Carolina's governor is accelerating

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Gov. Mark Sanford is a man alone these days. The Argentine lover whom he calls his “soul mate” still seems to be in Argentina. His wife Jenny, after telling *Vogue* magazine that her husband was having a “midlife crisis”, has left the governor’s mansion, taking the couple’s four sons with her. Democrats have launched a petition drive to rid the state of Sanford, with one Democratic gubernatorial candidate putting out an entertaining video. As a lovesick couple strolls on the sand, and a warden scans the Appalachians for signs of the wandering governor, South Carolinians are urged to sign the petition or face “500 [More] Days of Sanford.”

Most of his fellow Republicans, too, have made it clear they want the governor to go quietly. On August 26th his own lieutenant-governor asked him, publicly, to resign. If he refuses, he could face impeachment proceedings, probably in January but possibly sooner.

It is not only the sex scandal that is bringing the talk of impeachment to a boil. It is also outrage over press revelations that Mr. Sanford, an unbending fiscal conservative who tried to stop \$700 million in federal stimulus money from reaching South Carolina, and who famously directed state employees to use both sides of Post-it notes, used state planes both for personal trips (getting a haircut) and political trips, which is prohibited by state law.

He also charged taxpayers for first-class and business-class flights abroad, though state law requires him to travel as cheaply as possible when using commercial aircraft. “If you’re going to step straight into business meetings that have significant economic consequence for the people of our state,” Mr. Sanford explained, “you need to have gotten some level of sleep the night before.” The state ethics commission is now investigating.

The governor has rejected all calls to step down. Instead he is stepping up travel around the state, asking forgiveness for his lapses and announcing that his priority is now to restructure state government. All this when South Carolina’s unemployment rate was 11.8 percent in July, the sixth-highest in the country.

The governor, who was once considered a likely presidential contender in 2012, says he does not intend to run for any other political post once his term expires in January 2011. No one is begging him to change his mind.