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ABC, CBS and NBC Air 48 Stories on GOP Governor's Sex Life, But Ignore Democratic Corruption

Networks Mostly Mute on Democratic Scandals

In the week since South Carolina's Republican Governor announced he had flown to Argentina to carry on an extra-marital affair, the broadcast morning and evening news shows have gone full bore on the scandal, cranking out 48 stories even in the midst of other major stories like Michael Jackson's death and the continuing repression in Iran.

The morning after Sanford announced his affair, on the June 25 *Good Morning America*, longtime correspondent Sam Donaldson used the scandal to broadly charge Republicans with being "sanctimonious. They thump the Bible. They condemn everyone else, and when they [act] human, they don't have much credit in the bank for forgiveness." Unlike when New York Democratic Governor Eliot Spitzer was caught consorting with a prostitute in March 2008, all three broadcast networks immediately identified Sanford's party ID.

A number of top Democrats are enmeshed in embarrassment or facing allegations of wrongdoing, but the networks have far less interest in publicizing those cases. A rundown of ABC, CBS and NBC morning and evening coverage so far this year:

■ **Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY):** The Chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, Rangel coughed up \$75,000 in unpaid back taxes on rental income last year. The House ethics committee is investigating whether Rangel fulfilled all of his disclosure requirements related to that property, among other issues. In June, the panel launched another investigation of whether a Caribbean trip Rangel and four other Democrats took amounted to an improper gift.

None of these issues were mentioned on ABC, CBS or NBC this year, although Rangel was featured as a talking head in a number of morning and evening news stories. On March 19, the *CBS Evening News* included a Rangel soundbite in a story on congressional outrage over the AIG bonuses: "Stop the thievery at taxpayers' expense!" The next night, CBS had another clip of Rangel railing, "Stop the thievery!," but no mention of the chairman's ethics problems.

■ **Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), Rep. Pete Visclosky (D-IN) and Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA):** Three top Democrats are linked to the scandal surrounding the PMA Group, a lobbying group that closed its doors earlier this year after being raided by the FBI in February. The *New York Times* reported then that top lobbyist Paul Magliocchetti was suspected of funneling "bogus" campaign contributions to Murtha, Visclosky and Moran, in exchange for directing more than \$100 million to PMA clients. Rep. Visclosky had admitted being subpoenaed in May by a federal grand jury, and temporarily stepped down as Chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on energy and water development.

None of the broadcast networks have mentioned Visclosky and Moran's potential role in the scandal. ABC and NBC have been similarly quiet about Murtha, whom the networks elevated to folk-hero status for his condemnations of the Iraq war in 2005. CBS's Sharyl Attkisson, however, has produced three investigative pieces digging into Murtha's ethics, the most recent airing on the June 2 *Evening News*.

■ **Ex-Rep. William Jefferson (D-LA):** Jefferson lost a run-off election late last year after investigators found \$90,000 in cash stuffed in the congressman's freezer. In January, NBC made brief references to the charges against Jefferson in a profile of his successor, Republican Joseph Cao. Jefferson's bribery trial — prosecutors say he received \$400,000 in bribes to help orchestrate business deals in Africa — began on June 9, but the networks have yet to mention the case.

Mark Sanford's trouble is of his own making, of course. But the liberal networks seem a lot more excited about airing his dirty laundry than exposing the problems of top Democrats. — *Rich Noyes and Tim Graham*

ABC, CBS and NBC Morning and Evening Show Coverage of Various Scandal Figures January 1 to July 1, 2009	
Rep. Charles Rangel (D)	zero
Rep. John Murtha (D)	3 stories
Rep. Pete Visclosky (D)	zero
Rep. James Moran (D)	zero
Ex-Rep. William Jefferson (D)	2 stories
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Gov. Mark Sanford (R) (6/24-7/1)	48 stories

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