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ALUMNI IN POLITICAL SPOTLIGHT BRING ATTENTION TO ALMA MATER

It's always a point of pride when I see alumni making their marks. From music to medicine to teaching to literature — whatever the profession, members of the Furman family consistently help to better the world. In doing so, they bring great honor to alma mater.

In recent months, three alumni who are no strangers to readers of university publications have earned extensive attention in the political arena.

The new year had barely begun before the announcement came that President Bush had named retired Vice Adm. **Mike McConnell** '66 director of national intelligence. McConnell is a former head of the National Security Agency and former senior intelligence officer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War, when he was often seen on television briefing the nation.

In recent years McConnell has been a vice president of Booz Allen Hamilton, a global strategy and consulting firm based in Falls Church, Va. Furman presented him its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1991.

In making the appointment, President Bush praised McConnell's experience, intellect and character and said, "He has decades of experience ensuring that our military forces have the intelligence they need to fight and win wars."

For his part, McConnell said, "Public service has always been my passion. I look forward to serving this great nation as we continue to fight the global war on terrorism and to face the many new challenges of the new century."

The November elections brought additional attention to two other Furman alumni.

Avoiding the pitfalls that many Republican candidates encountered in 2006, **Mark Sanford** '83 was re-elected governor of South Carolina.



Mike McConnell



Mark Sanford



Baron Hill

Sanford, who was kind enough to invite the Furman Singers to perform at both of his inaugurations, spent much of his first term battling with the state legislature over both the merits and the implementation of his agenda, which includes such issues as restructuring state government and education reforms. In a state where the legislature has long been more powerful than the governor, Sanford struggled to convince his legislative colleagues of the wisdom of most of his ideas, and the result was more acrimony than accomplishment.

But Sanford did seem to get along with the people of South Carolina. He was re-elected by a 10 percent margin — a larger victory margin than in 2002. As he begins his second term, he and the legislature have, at least publicly, indicated a willingness to set aside past differences and work together to find common ground, although rumblings still can be heard from both sides. It will be interesting to see how things transpire for Sanford, a notorious maverick who is not afraid to stand his ground and challenge the powers that be.

While Sanford won re-election, **Baron Hill** '75 was elected — again — to the U.S. House from the ninth district of Indiana.

Notice that I used the term "elected again." Hill, a Democrat who was a point guard for the Furman basketball team during the Joe Williams era,

had served in Congress from 1998 to 2004, when he lost in a bid for a fourth term to Republican Mike Sodrel. The 2006 election marked their third close race — Hill had edged Sodrel in 2002 — and this time the Furman alumnus rode the wave of disenchantment with Republican leadership back into office.

Hill is part of the "Blue Dog Coalition," a group of conservative-to-moderate Democrats who, according to their Web site, strive "to bridge the gap between ideological extremes." Perhaps he and his colleagues can help end the partisan bickering that has marred Washington politics in recent years.

As this year progresses, I encourage you to watch for news about the work of these gentlemen, all of whom deserve credit for their willingness to step into leadership roles during these critical times.

And I think it's safe to predict that, assuming arrangements can be made in the midst of their busy schedules, you'll see feature-length articles about each of them in future issues of this magazine.

CLOSING NOTE: I'd be remiss if I didn't include a brief reminder about Homecoming 2007, scheduled November 2-4. Beginning with the Class of 1947, special reunions are scheduled for classes ending in 2 and 7.

If you are interested in volunteering to be on your reunion committee or would like more information about Homecoming, please contact Tina Hayes Ballew '78, associate director of the Alumni Association, at tina.ballew@furman.edu or by calling 1-800-PURPLE3.

— TOM TRIPLITT '76

The author is director of the Alumni Association.