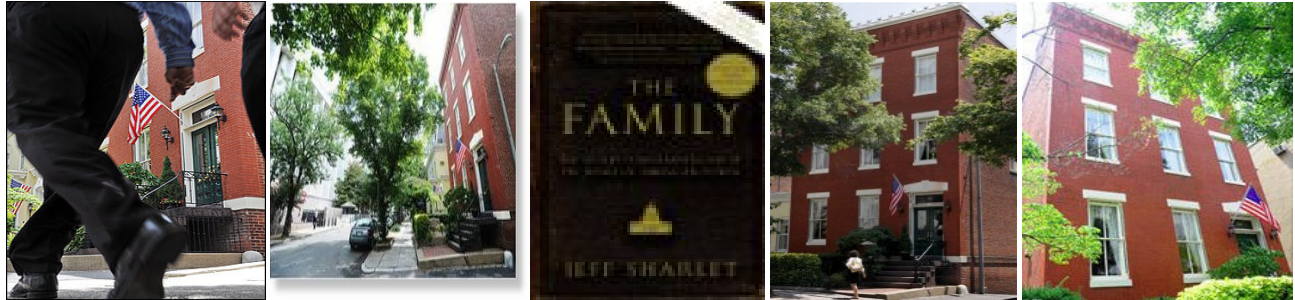


Rachel Maddow: "C Street House"

Republican house run by weird, secretive Christian fellowship "The Family"

By Rachel Maddow, *The Rachel Maddow Show*. Posted July 14, 2009.

Sen. John Ensign's affair has brought unwanted attention on a powerful religious network in Washington.



GOP Sex Scandal Exposes Secretive Conservative Religious Group -- 'The Family'

*The following is a transcript from *The Rachel Maddow Show* on Washington D.C.'s "C Street House," which is now at the center of a media firestorm. Now GOP Senator Tom Coburn, sex-scandal embroiled GOP leaders Senator John Ensign and South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford have been tied to the C Street House, which is registered as a church and provides substantially lower than market rate rent. Coburn and Ensign have lived at the C Street house, while Sanford has participated in its Bible study group.*

We start with a mystery -- a mystery that's unfolding alongside the two major political scandals of the summer. It's a mystery that concerns this house at 133 C Street Southeast in Washington, D.C. I'm calling it a house because that's what it looks like to me and people do live there.

But if you consult this building's financial paper trail, you will find that it's actually considered to be a church. That designation makes C Street a convenient tax-free haven for the secretive organization that runs it, an organization known as the Family. It also makes for some awkward tax and income questions for the at least five, probably seven members of Congress who live at the house, in exchange for what appears to be substantially below market rent.

As explained by our guest last night, Jeff Sharlet, who secretly infiltrated the family to write a book about them, the C Street house is a former convent. It's used as a sort of subsidized, really upscale dorm for members of Congress who are associated with this powerful, poorly understood religious group.

The Family and the house at C Street have ended up reluctantly in the headlines now because of the two major politicians' sex scandals that are embroiling the Republican Party this summer and that have taken two of their reported 2012 presidential hopefuls out of political contention.

Embattled Nevada Senator John Ensign lives at the C Street house. The husband of Senator Ensign's mistress says that prominent members of the Family -- this religious group -- including the sons of the group's founder, as well as other members of Congress who live at C Street -- were both aware of Ensign's secret affair and were involved in his efforts to pay off the mistress and her family as the affair was on again-off again ending.

Republican Senator Tom Coburn lives at C Street with Ensign. He has said he encouraged Ensign to end the affair but he has denied the allegation that he specifically encouraged Senator Ensign to pay the mistress off to the tune of millions of dollars.

South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford mentioned C Street by name in his long public statement of regret about his affair with a woman in Argentina.

Unidentified male: Did your wife and your family know about the affair before the trip to Argentina?

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford: Yes.

Unidentified male: For how long?

Sanford: We've been -- we've been working through this thing for about the last five months. I've been to a lot of different -- I was part of a group called C Street, when I was in Washington. It was a, believe it or not, a Christian Bible study -- some folks that asked of members of Congress hard questions that I think were very, very important and I've been working with them.

Maddow: Hard questions.

Governor Sanford said he was working with C Street somehow about his affair for months -- while the affair was ongoing, while it was still secret, and while Governor Sanford continued to lie about it publicly.

This is the first point about C Street and the Family that makes the group more than just a cameo appearance in both of these sex scandals. In both instances, these powerful family values preaching, conservative politicians who were themselves having adulterous affairs say now that they disclosed those affairs to other members of Congress and other people affiliated with the secretive religious group for a long time while the affairs continued and while they were kept secret from the world at large. This organization was allowed to know but nobody else was.

Zack Wamp of Tennessee is a Republican member of Congress who says he has lived in the C Street house for 12 years. Today, he told "The Knoxville News Sentinel" that the members of Congress who live there are sworn to secrecy.

Quoting from the "News Sentinel," "The C Street residents have all agreed they won't talk about their private living arrangements, Wamp said and he intends to honor that pact. 'I hate it that John Ensign lives in the house and this happened because it opens up all of these kinds of questions,' Wamp said. But, he said, 'I'm not going to be the guy who goes out and talks.'"

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Don L. Johnson

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