

The Man Who Could Topple Jack Murtha

by Michelle Malkin

A jaw-dropping political miracle may be on the horizon. No, I'm not talking about the second coming of the Obamessiah. I'm talking about the long-deserved comeuppance of troop-smearing, pork-feasting, scandal-tainted Democratic Rep. Jack Murtha of Pennsylvania.

The 18-term congressman's challenger, staunch conservative Republican newcomer William Russell, raised nearly \$670,000 in the second fundraising quarter. Earmark king Murtha scraped together a measly \$119,000. Russell's underdog campaign bested Murtha without the perks of incumbency, national name recognition, big PAC donations or mainstream media support.

Even more amazing: The 45-year-old Russell, a Desert Storm veteran, former Army lieutenant colonel and Army reservist who survived the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon, was not even publicly campaigning during the quarter. He is on active duty with the Army until after Aug. 1 and is barred from actively campaigning until then.

If all that didn't make this enough of an inspiring David and Goliath story: In February, a Pennsylvania judge ruled that Russell had failed to collect enough signatures to make the primary ballot. But Russell refused to give up on his goal of permanently redeploying Murtha from his entrenched seat of power in Washington. The GOP neophyte persevered on a shoestring budget and won more than 4,000 write-in votes in the spring to earn a spot on the general election ballot. According to Russell's campaign manager and veteran GOP activist Peg Luksik, the bulk of contributions from about 16,000 donors in the second quarter were less than \$50.

Russell's clear on where he stands. No doubt Barack Obama would label him bitter and clingy. "I am a Conservative," he says in his defining campaign statement. "I believe in the sovereignty and security of this one nation, under God. I believe the primary role of government is to provide for the common defense and a legal framework to protect families and individual liberty. ... I believe that no one owes me anything just because I live and breathe."

The excitement and buzz around Russell stand in stark contrast to grass-roots disgust on the right with Beltway Republicans who continue to push the party to the left in a brain-dead attempt to "rebrand" the GOP. He has united pro-troops families, social conservatives, fiscal conservatives, Reagan Democrats and Independents fed up with Murtha's culture of corruption dating back to his Abscam days in the 1980s. Murtha was not indicted in the infamous bribery probe, but he was videotaped entertaining a \$50,000 bribe from undercover FBI agents posing as emissaries for Arab sheiks trying to enter our country illegally.

"The incredible story about Bill's campaign is that the \$15 and \$25 contributions are coming in from all over Pennsylvania and every corner of the country," Luksik noted on the Russell Brigade website (www.russellbrigade.com). "This is K-Street versus Main Street. These are patriotic families expressing support for soldiers, sailors and Marines, and people saying they've had enough of the old 'pay-to-play' culture in the Capitol. That's what's fueling this campaign."

Russell decided to enter politics after hearing Murtha's slanderous 2006 accusations that Marines in Haditha "overreacted because of the pressure on them, and they killed innocent civilians in cold blood." As I reported in June, seven Marines have been cleared or won case dismissals in the Iraq war incident Murtha recklessly adjudicated in the court of public opinion -- with willing mainstream journalists at The New York Times, MSNBC, and in the world press swinging their nooses.

Perhaps that complicity explains the great media wall of silence around Russell's upstart campaign. Republican Bill Russell offers ethical, freedom-enhancing, pro-responsibility, anti-retreat, unapologetically conservative change they don't want to believe in.

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