



Mikulski Fundraising Dwarfs Potential Challengers for 2010 - Southern Maryland Headline News

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By *DIANA NGUYEN*

COLLEGE PARK (August 28, 2009) -- The latest campaign finance reports show that Democratic Sen. Barbara Mikulski has \$1.5 million on hand for a 2010 re-election bid, only a fraction of the amount she had for her last election.

But potential opponents have even less.

"The Republican Party in Maryland is about as well as a corpse," said Eric Uslaner, professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The four-term senator raised almost \$800,000 in the quarter that ended June 20 and had a little more than \$1.5 million cash on hand, according to the most recent reports with the Federal Election Commission.

Of three Republican challengers so far, only Jim Rutledge had raised any money, according to the FEC, with \$1,875 cash on hand, \$15,147 in spending and \$8,856 in debt. A second challenger, Eric Wargotz, of Queenstown, has not reported any fundraising yet, but said he expects to file in the next quarter.

Republican Daniel McAndrew of Forest Hill has filed a statement of candidacy with the Maryland State Board of Elections, but has not yet filed with the FEC. The same is true of unaffiliated candidate Robert Henry Brookman of Catonsville.

The Republicans said they are not daunted by Mikulski's fundraising advantage, vowing to run a grassroots campaign that focuses on the incumbent's record.

"I think all incumbents are weak," said James Pelura, chairman of the Maryland Republican Party.

But political and campaign finance experts predict Republicans will have a hard time unseating Mikulski, who has never received less than 60.7 percent of the vote.

In an overwhelmingly Democratic state like Maryland, with a senator who wins 60 to 80 percent of the vote because she handles constituents and politics well, Mikulski doesn't need that much money to win, Uslaner said.

He said the amount of money Mikulski currently has on hand is considered low: She received more than \$6 million in total contributions before the 2004 election.

The most important thing when trying to unseat an incumbent is not money but how well the candidate did in the last race, said John Samples, director of the Center for Representative Government at the Cato Institute. A small margin shows weakness and tells the challenging party that the incumbent can be beaten.

Mikulski, however, has always won the popular vote by a large margin.

Samples predicted the Republican Party will most likely put its financial efforts toward securing open seats, defending Republican incumbents and fighting against incumbent Democrats with apparent weaknesses.

But Pelura said that when there are candidates who are willing to work hard, money is less of a factor. This is a strange year, he said, and incumbents don't have a good record.

"This election cycle is very unique. I've never seen this level of outrage from grassroots, the people," Pelura said. "Incumbents, even Republicans, need to come back to their communities and get back to their constituents."

The Republican candidates said they will focus on grassroots campaigning.

Rutledge, an attorney from Jarrettsville, said he is out to remove a career politician like Mikulski, who has succumbed to foreign influence when Marylanders need help, are out of work and in a recession.

"I am giving citizens a clear choice between an entrenched, career politician, who has turned her back on Americans and forgot her roots, or an independent like me, who puts the American people first," said Rutledge.

About 43 percent of Mikulski's campaign finances came from political action committees. Rutledge got 2.9 percent of his campaign funding from PACS. Wargotz did not discuss his finances except to say that he has raised money and would file in the next cycle.

As for disapproval with incumbents, a June Pew Research Center poll asked Americans, "Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the job the Democratic/Republican leaders in Congress are doing?" Forty-two percent said they approved of Democratic leaders while 29 percent said they approved of Republican leaders.

The survey included 1,502 adults nationwide, and has a margin of error of 3 percent.

Mikulski's office declined to comment on the senator's campaign finances.

Capital News Service contributed to this report.