

## Newsmax

# Joe Miller's Upset Win Spurs Tea Party Challenge to GOP

Wednesday, September 1, 2010 08:23 PM

**By: David A. Patten**

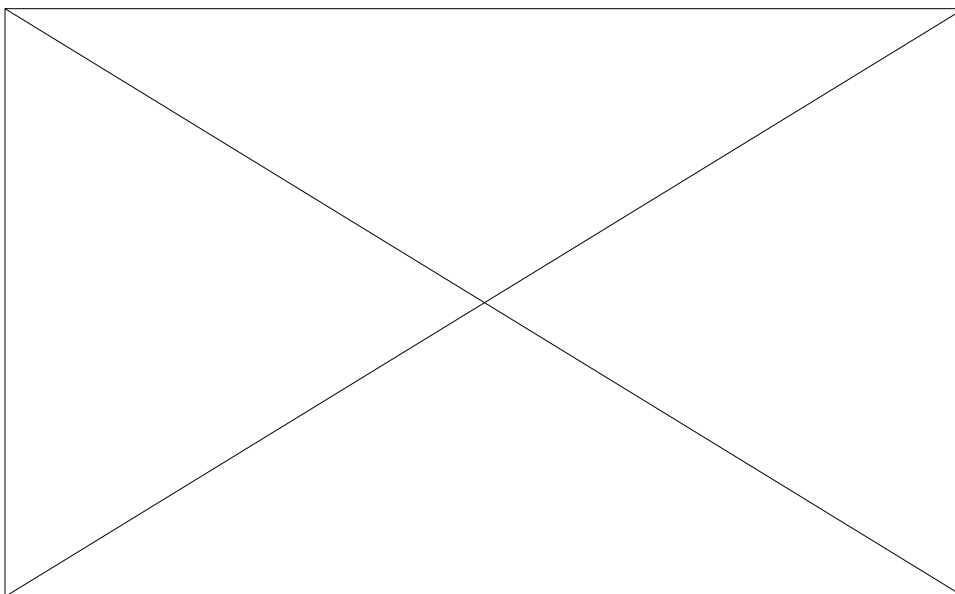
It wasn't long ago tea party leaders worried about a GOP takeover. But after Joe Miller's stunning win over GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski in Alaska, sources now say the Republican establishment is concerned about a grass-roots movement whose power has expanded so rapidly that it now threatens the party's political hegemony.

Leading the charge: grass-roots conservatives who rocked the political landscape by propelling a relative unknown, Fairbanks attorney Joe Miller, ahead of an incumbent senator with strong GOP support. Murkowski reportedly outspent Miller 10-to-1, and her family had controlled her U.S. Senate seat for three decades.

"Well, I don't know if 'taking over' [the GOP] is the right word," Miller said with a chuckle during an exclusive Newsmax.TV interview Wednesday. "I think the message that is being spread of returning the country back to its constitutional foundations is absolutely something that can put the Republican Party back on track. It is something that, if embraced, could allow the Republican Party to provide the answers to a nation that is in crisis right now.

"So really it's the option of those in the establishment, that if they want to be in a leadership position in this nation, they should look at these ideals that are being pushed by these activists, consider them, I think embrace them, and I think lead this country out of the crisis point that it's in."

**Story continues below.**



Others in the grass-roots movement put it more bluntly: The tea party freight train is

roaring down the track, and GOP insiders should hop aboard or move out of the way.

"We have gone toe-to-toe with the establishment," said grass-roots organizer Brendan Steinhauser of FreedomWorks. "We have won. 'We' is a big we. It's all the grass-roots folks out there in Utah, Colorado, Alaska, Florida, and everywhere else . . . The tea party movement is not going away."

Miller is only the latest tea party-supported insurgent to win against the GOP's "official" candidate.

Against the national GOP's anointed favorites, the tea party has racked up extraordinary victories: Rand Paul in Kentucky, Ken Buck in Colorado, Sharron Angle in Nevada, Mike Lee in Utah, and Marco Rubio in Florida, to name just a few.

Some grass-roots conservatives have expressed frustration that, even in races without an incumbent Republican, the Republican establishment has favored moderates over devout conservatives.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) stood with Florida Gov. Charlie Crist over Rubio in Florida, until shortly before his announcement that the Grand Old Party was no longer his cup of tea. In Alaska, NRSC Chairman Sen. John Cornyn provoked a rebellion on his right when he sent the committee's chief counsel to help Murkowski in her absentee-ballot counting battle, a fight she relinquished Tuesday night when she conceded the race to Miller.

"I think it absolutely sends a message," says grass-roots icon Amy Kremer of Tea Party Express, who spent the past few weeks in Alaska organizing grass-roots activity that helped Miller's campaign. "We're not going to stand for Washington politics as usual, and we're shaking things up."

Kremer adds: "I think we have the Republicans more running scared than we do the Democrats . . . I don't think that the Republicans expected this movement to be so anti-incumbent, anti-Republican."

Miller has acknowledged the critical role that Tea Party Express played in his victory. The organization estimates it expended over \$600,000 on the race.

Michael Tanner, the Cato Institute senior fellow and author of "Leviathan on the Right: How Big-Government Conservatism Brought Down the Republican Revolution," commented: "You're finding that in race after race the establishment here in Washington has put their weight behind moderate, establishment candidates, people who have a history of elective office, people who in their judgment 'can win.'

"I think they're misjudging the electoral mood right now," he said.

"We're fighting the good-old-boys network. That's what this is, the good old boy club," Kremersaid .

Getting true small-government conservatives elected is what Steinhauser does for a living. As director of state and federal campaigns for FreedomWorks, which in many ways midwifed the tea party movement in its infancy, he's seen the movement evolve from the days when it mostly organized rallies and town hall meetings.

Now the movement's activities often are less obvious — but more powerful at the ballot box.

"We learned from our mistakes and we're starting to do it better," he said. "If we can turn out thousands of people to a protest, that's going to make an impact. But if we can actually get some phone banking and go door to door, we're going to win Republican primaries and we're going to win the general election."

Steinhauser said conservative activists also are discussing how to hone their message to appeal to the all-important independent voters who tend to determine electoral outcomes.

How the activism ultimately impacts the GOP remains to be seen. But grass-roots activists claim they've already essentially taken control of the party apparatus in Nevada and Utah. Steinhauser envisions that phenomenon spreading.

"I think it is happening nationally," he told Newsmax. "Attempts are being made, I guarantee it. Everywhere I've been people are saying . . . let's go and get involved at the precinct level, at the county level, at the committee-person level, and let's get involved here because we have to control the levers of power, the machinery."

Local party bosses are fighting back, he said, changing the rules and rewriting the bylaws to make it harder for activists to move in.

"So you're seeing a lot of resistance in some of these state parties," he said. "Many of these people have their own little niche, their own little power structure, and they're comfortable and happy. So we've got to kick out the party bosses. I told them, 'We have to take it over. We have to become the party bosses. But we can't lose our soul. We can't allow it to change us. We've got to change it.'"

Activists in Ohio and Pennsylvania, Steinhausen said, have "really had a rough time with the GOP."

He welcomes a change of heart from establishment Republicans. But he has brutally honest message for loyalists who continue to put party over everything.

Speaking with confidence after Miller's upset, he said: "We will beat you. We will win. And we will basically, systematically, over the next few election cycles, we will replace you."

Tanner agreed that power clearly is shifting from the Republican establishment to grass-roots conservatives. And he doesn't believe Republican leaders are at all happy about it.

"It's already, especially in the Senate, a little bit like herding cats for the leadership," he explained. "Every time a bill comes up and [Oklahoma Republican Sen. Tom] Coburn has his amendment to strip out some wasteful spending project, you can almost hear the audible groans from the Mitch McConnells of the world who want the Senate to function more efficiently, and hate the fact that they have to go through all these votes on what they consider minor issues.

"Now they're going to have a whole bunch of people who are going to look at legislation that way."

So does Miller's upset win foreshadow a day when the tea parties take over the national GOP?

Many tea party activists wouldn't want that role anyway.

Tea Party Patriots leadership council member Ryan Hecker, the orchestrator of the Contract From America movement, told Newsmax: "The tea party's goal is for the principles of economic conservatism and constitutionally limited government to win out.

This doesn't necessarily mean unseating incumbents and taking over one particular party. But it certainly is helpful to have a large number of elected officials who support our principles in power."

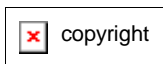
Or, as Tanner said: "The tea party would actually have to be much more organized to actually take anything over. But the reality is you're seeing a new breed of candidate, and a new breed of activist within the Republican Party, that is very different from the establishment.

"We have sort of a trend here," he said. "Republican candidates this time around are going to be much more conservative, much more limited government than they have in the last couple of years."

Michael Patrick Leahy, author of "Rules for Conservative Radicals" and co-founder of the National Tea Party coalition, told Newsmax he believes the rising influence of grassroots activists may impact both parties, and is here to stay.

"These victories by tea party candidates are merely indications of the changes going on in the American political system," he said. "We're entering what I call a new era of grass-roots democracy. And it's one where you're going to see a decline in the power of the national establishment of both parties . . . in setting the agenda.

"The agenda is increasingly going to be set by the grass-roots conservative activists who comprise the tea party movement," Leahy said. "This is just the opening act for a complete change in the way politics takes place in America."



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