



10/01/2008

Weasel Or Lemming: You Decide

By Robert A. Mitchell Jr., For The Bulletin

With our federal government plunging into the bailout business, you would think our members of Congress would be giving it serious thought. At least that was my belief.

So nine days ago, I decided to call my representative to see where he stands. I called U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy's, D-8th, of Bucks, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties, office in Washington, D.C. He apparently pays staff to answer phones.

Unfortunately, he doesn't give them anything to say. Notwithstanding the collapse of Bear Sterns, Lehman Brothers, Fannie & Freddie, American International Group (AIG) and countless smaller banks, Rep. Murphy's staff said the financial crisis was very new to him and he hadn't had time to form any opinions. I told his staff that I would call back later after Rep. Murphy had some time to think about it.

And call back I did. Every day I called Rep Murphy's office, and every day it was the same answer, "Rep. Murphy has no opinion on the financial crisis." What does he think about bailing out Wall Street banks? No opinion. What does he think about going deeper in debt? No opinion. What does he think about buying mortgage backed securities that no other institution on the planet will touch with a 10-foot pole? No opinion. Does he think it is appropriate for the federal government to nationalize private financial institutions? No opinion.

After five days of these calls, I began to see a trend.

With all of the hype over the weekend and the announcement from congressional leaders that they had struck a deal, I was eager to find out where Rep. Murphy stood on the deal. Surely, I thought, he would have had the time to form a coherent statement about some aspect of this crisis.

I called Rep. Murphy's Washington office around 1:30 p.m. on Monday. Radio reports at the time said that the House votes were in and the deal was defeated, but Speaker Pelosi was putting pressure on eleven Democrats to change their votes in a last minute attempt to save the bill. Curious as to whether my representative was one of the eleven, I asked his office how he had voted. The reply: "The vote is not final yet, so we cannot say." Cannot say? Or will not say?

Not satisfied with that response, I pressed the staffers. What was Rep. Murphy's inclination going into the vote? (We can't say) Does he believe the crisis is serious enough to warrant immediate action? (We can't say) Are you telling me that you do not know if he has voted yet? (No) So then are you saying you don't know how he voted? (No) Well, if you know how he voted, why are you concealing it from a constituent?

This whole experience left a very bad taste in my mouth. Either my representative was completely clueless about the most important piece of legislation that he will ever see, or he was adamant at concealing his position from his own district. As I saw it, he was either a weasel, afraid to face his own voters, or a lemming who was blindly following someone else's lead.

I returned home and looked up his vote on the Internet. He had voted, "yes" to the deal. Regardless of his vote, this isn't the kind of person I want representing me.

Robert A. Mitchell Jr. is an attorney in Bucks County.

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