

## Post-Mortem: VA-5

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 3, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Congressman Tom Perriello, a one-time Catholic missionary and human rights activist, lost his bid for re-election in Virginia's Fifth Congressional District. Republican Robert Hurt took 51% of the vote in the sprawling Virginia district to Perriello's 47%. Perriello was the only member of Congress to have the President come to his district to campaign for him, but the election-eve rally in Charlottesville was not enough to generate Democratic enthusiasm at the polls.

In fact, Perriello did worse this year in Albemarle County than he did in 2008, polling 57% to Hurt's 42%. In 2008, Perriello won the county with 63%. In Charlottesville City itself, Perriello won 80% of the vote but the turnout was not strong enough, despite the President's visit, to offset his losses in the more rural parts of the district.

The winner, Mr. Hurt, is a mainstream Republican, currently a state Senator. Hurt fended off a Tea Party challenger in the primaries but echoed many of their concerns in the general election. He called for limited government, less regulation and reduced spending, and extolled the free enterprise system. Mostly, however, he campaigned as the un-Perriello, tying his opponent to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and President Obama at every turn.

In Congress, Perriello voted for the economic stimulus, the health care reform legislation and for climate change legislation. Instead of backing away from those votes, he campaigned tirelessly to explain why he believed they were in the best interests of his constituents. But, subtle arguments got lost in a race that saw more than \$4 million of outside campaign cash, almost all of it spent on highly negative ads that only increased voter disgust with politics and Washington.

In his concession speech, Perriello spoke of the religious motivation behind his politics. "Judgment Day is more important than Election Day, and it's more important to do what's right than what's easy," he told a crowd of disappointed supporters. Perriello's campaign was assisted by a variety of faith-based groups including the ecumenical organization, Matthew 25, and Catholics United. President Obama praised Perriello's political courage during his campaign appearance. But, it was not enough.

Virginia's Fifth Congressional District is conservative territory, voting for John McCain two years ago. Perriello won the seat in 2008 by only 727 votes, defeating a long-serving incumbent in a year when the Democrats were carrying the banner for "change." With parts of his district suffering from double-digit unemployment, the voters still wanted change in 2010 and, as the incumbent, Perriello felt the lash of the same desire that had propelled him to office two years prior.

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