

# MARY BETH BUCHANAN'S GOING AWAY PRESENT: JACK MURTHA?

In December, US Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan wrote a letter declaring that she would not resign at the end of the Bush Administration.

Last month, Buchanan released a letter stating that she had no intention of submitting her resignation. An ideologically committed Federalist Society member, Buchanan is close to former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, who actively promoted her as U.S. attorney. Following her appointment in 2001, Buchanan quickly gained the favor and approval of the White House. In the key period of 2004-05, while groundwork was laid for what later became the U.S. attorney's scandal, Buchanan served as director of the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, the key position at Justice that oversaw all the 94 U.S. attorneys. A later internal Justice Department probe, in which Buchanan figures prominently, highlights the role played by that office in Karl Rove's plan to sack U.S. attorneys.

She said she had to stick around, at least partly, so she could see her trumped up prosecution of Cyril Wecht through.

The second case is a corruption prosecution of one of the country's most prominent medical examiners, Dr. Cyril Wecht, also not coincidentally a leading figure in Pittsburgh Democratic politics. The charges brought against Wecht involve a long list of petty accusations, including that he used his

office telephone and fax machine for personal matters. These charges happen to bear remarkable similarity to accusations of petty improprieties that flew around Buchanan's mentor Santorum in the two years before Pennsylvania voters retired him from public life in 2006. Buchanan, however, opted not to pursue any of the accusations surrounding Santorum. Wecht's defense counsel, former Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, who served under George H.W. Bush and was governor of Pennsylvania, testified before a House Judiciary inquiry that Buchanan's prosecution was improper and politically motivated. "It is not the type of case normally constituting a federal 'corruption' case brought against a local official," said Thornburgh. "There is no allegation that Dr. Wecht ever solicited or received a bribe or kickback. There is no allegation that Dr. Wecht traded on a conflict of interest in conducting the affairs of his selected office." The case was originally tried before a judge appointed by George W. Bush who, though close to Buchanan, refused to recuse himself and forbade defense counsel in any way from referencing Buchanan's political motivation. The trial ended in a hung jury, which divided sharply in favor of Wecht's acquittal. Afterward, individual jurors harshly criticized Buchanan's conduct and she responded by sending FBI agents to "interview" them.

Notwithstanding broad appeals from the Pennsylvania legal community for Buchanan to drop the case, she has pledged to continue it. The judge who originally oversaw the case, meanwhile, has been removed by order of an appeals court. Buchanan cites the supposedly unresolved Wecht case as a reason why she must stay on as U.S. attorney.

But I think she's got much bigger Democratic fish she wants to stick around to fry: Jack Murtha. The NYT follows up on what ABC reported earlier: that investigators conducted two raids on entities associated with Murtha.

Federal investigators have raided the offices of the PMA Group, one of Washington's biggest lobbying firms, as part of an investigation into potentially improper campaign contributions, a person briefed on the investigators' questions said Monday night.

[snip]

Last month, the Federal Bureau of Investigation also raided one of the local contractors, Kuchera Industries, which has benefited heavily from his appropriations work while its executives contributed to his campaigns.

Kuchera was not a PMA client, and it is unclear whether either raid is related to Mr. Murtha. But Steve Ellis, a spokesman for Taxpayers for Common Sense, said PMA's ties to Mr. Murtha had long been its calling card.

"PMA has been known as the gatekeeper to Jack Murtha," Mr. Ellis said, "and if you wanted to get an earmark from Murtha you went through Paul Magliochetti and associates."

Note the timing: Murtha wins his closest election in years in November. And then the Feds raid a lobbying firm closely connected to him. In December, Buchanan refuses to step down. And in January the FBI raids Kuchera—a company that has no clear ties to PMA, but is closely associated with Murtha.

Mind you, Murtha has long been acknowledged to be one of the most corrupt Democrats in Congress. I'm sure there's at least something

that Buchanan used to justify this investigation.

But just as Murtha has long been acknowledged to be one of the most corrupt Dems, Buchanan has been acknowledged to be one of the most corrupt US Attorneys. Which means, given Buchanan's obstinate refusal to leave, this one may blow up into a full-fledged political witch hunt.