

The Rally

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by Jim Bernheimer

Steven Avery wasn't used to being under the lights and on stage. He was a "kingmaker" and a "power behind the power" type. The Veterans of Foreign Wars convention hall here in Clearfield hosted numerous political rallies over the years, but never one like this.

"Thank you all for coming out. Congressman Albright and his wife are very grateful." Steven scanned the crowd crammed into the main room. Many were just the political equivalent of rubbernecks, looking for a spectacle. Glancing behind him, he spotted the large flat screen scrolling the campaign slogan; *All Day All Night Albright! Working for YOU 24/7!*

"It's only fitting that we launch Brian's reelection bid here at the VFW. Everyone knows the stories of his heroism in World War Zed, how he and his tanks stopped the attackers in their tracks at St. Louis and held the Mississippi!"

He waited for the genuine applause to die down. It was a good sign. Maybe this wasn't just a shot in the dark. "The fighting didn't stop there! With your support, Brian went to Washington DC to make certain that your voices would be heard. He not only stands on his record, but he built a fortress on it!"

Steven slapped his hands on the podium for emphasis. "He wasn't afraid to challenge the broken system in Washington, championing economic reform, health care, and the rights of the common man. When faced with a problem, Brian Albright didn't take the easy way out or the path of political expediency. He met the problem head on regardless of the opposition.

For the last two decades, Congressman Albright fought against the policies that those people in the Capitol casually inflicted on the everyday working men and women. Each time, you rewarded him with reelection. That's what we're asking for once more."

A voice belonging to a burly man heckled him, "This whole thing is some kind of sick joke! Its bad enough putting up with them on the jobsite; you think I'm going to vote for one to represent me? Screw this! I'm outta here!"

Steven expected this, "Sir, I respect your opinion, but let me ask you something, what do you do for a living?"

The man crossed his arms and glared, "I'm a construction foreman."

"And how has the Tolerance Act affected you?"

"I've had to hire a buncha them and they ain't worth a damn! They can't take orders for nothing. Hell, they can barely understand me!"

A murmur of agreement passed through the crowd, "I know. Congressman Albright knows. He fought tooth and nail against the Tolerance Act and was betrayed by the self-serving party system – those fat cats on the right who wanted cheap, inexhaustible sources of labor for their greedy corporate buddies and those in his own party who saw nothing more than the ability to register thousands of constituents with the mental faculties of a three year old."

The man didn't leave – another good sign. Steven toggled the remote control to start the stump speech. "I could explain, but I think I know someone better equipped. Let me play a message recorded six months ago by Congressman Albright."

Turning, he saw the scene once more. It was a hospital room. Brian sat in his bed looking both bald and gaunt from the radiation and the chemo, but his eyes still held a shadow of that commanding presence he was famous for.

"My fellow... My friends, there comes a time when even an old warhorse has to admit defeat. This damn disease got the best of me and it's only a matter of time. It's widely known that I, like a fifth of the population, carry that despicable genetic marker. Originally, I intended to be cremated, but after thinking about it and doing some serious soul searching, I decided to let the reanimation happen. Why? Well, for one thing, I can still serve your interests. The Zombie Tolerance Act and other detestable legislation has hurt our economy and endangered our livelihood. These policies call for fair treatment of creatures that without feeding muzzles wouldn't hesitate to attack. Trying to give human rights to monsters is wrong, just plain wrong!"

Brian broke into a fitful cough that lasted a full fifteen seconds. Steven sensed the building empathy in the crowd. The tide was turning.

"What I'm asking from you is a chance to stick it to the other five hundred and thirty-four members of Congress. Send me back there and make them have to play by the rules that they don't mind saddling the rest of America with. Heck, you might even get better representation. Sorry, that's a bad joke. Either way, showing them the direct effects of their folly will be the first step in reversing this perilous course they've set this country on. Thank you and God bless America."

Steven cleared his throat, fighting off his own emotions. "I was Brian's friend before I was his campaign manager. He believes in this and thinks it will work. I do as well. If you really want to stick it to Washington this year, vote a true zombie in, instead of all the phony ones already there! Are you ready to meet your once and future Congressman?"

The crowd cheered, led by the construction worker's whistles. Steven motioned and aides escorted Brian and his wife out. In his red, white, and blue muzzle, Brian walked stiffly with head held high. His vocabulary was reduced to a mere fifty-seven words. They'd spent hours working on "Vote for Brian." Unafraid, Steven shook his friend's hand, helping him to the podium, and crossing his fingers for the three words Steven wanted most to hear.

The voice was raspy, "Vote... Vote for... brains! Vote for brains!"

Steven stomach knotted. Just when he thought it was over, shouts of "Brains!" erupted from the crowd. He shrugged off the gaffe, joining in. Even in death, Brian was a genius.