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## Jury finds Murray innocent

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Innocent on both counts.

Ohio Valley Coal Co. owner Robert E. Murray was visibly relieved when a Columbus jury announced Friday afternoon he'd been found innocent of all charges following a week-long trial which culminated with more than three hours of jury deliberation.

The charges were brought by Athens environmentalist Chad Kister, who testified that Murray assaulted him during a break in a Dec. 13, 2000, Ohio Reclamation Commission hearing concerning Dysart Woods.

"The acquittal today of Mr. Robert E.

Murray, director of The Ohio Valley Coal Company, proves that these very serious accusations by Chad Kister were politically and financially motivated," according to a statement issued by Ohio Valley Coal. "These allegations were designed to besmirch Mr. Murray's character and reputation, hurt Mr. Murray's mining business and extort financial gain from him."

Kister said his only motive was to punish the person he said attacked him.

"It is a lie to say I did this to further any environmental agenda. I simply cooperated with the prosecutor and testified to what happened," Kister said. "I have a permanent neck injury and my assailant effectively got off because he bought some very good lawyers."

Juror Alnola Beckham, however, said the jury returned innocent verdicts because, "They didn't present evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. I feel there was no evidence to prove an assault. There were no pictures, no medical records."

"Mr. Murray did not assault anyone," according to the company's statement. "He could not have because of his impaired physical condition on the date in question. Testimony also proved he did not commit disorderly conduct."

Murray's lead counsel, Clyde Bennett II, said, "Mr. Murray should never have been charged. He maintained his innocence from day one. We demonstrated the

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charges were false and politically motivated and that's why the jury acquitted on both counts.

"I hope Mr. Murray can get back to the normal course of his life and continue to be a productive member of society."

Kister testified under cross examination that he is considering a civil lawsuit in the matter. Bennett said the acquittals "substantially

impair" the credibility of any civil lawsuit.

The trial before Franklin County Municipal Court Judge Mark S. Froehlich included three days of testimony from eight witnesses, including both Kister and Murray. A four-man, four-woman jury was impaneled Monday and final deliberations lasted most of the day Friday.