

Wednesday, January 14, 2004

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

KENNEDY TO RUN FOR U. S. SENATE

My column had been posted last week for about fifteen minutes when I received the first of several calls. It was a confidant of state treasurer John Kennedy assuring me that he will definitely be in the race for United States Senator this fall. Several other calls followed shortly thereafter.

Kennedy is saying nothing official yet. He apparently wants to let the new governor have the spotlight over the next few weeks. But come the first of February, several people close to him are giving assurances he will definitely be making a public announcement.

Kennedy is saying "Why not?" He was just re-elected for a second term as state treasurer without any opposition and has a free shot at the senate race. And if he let's this opportunity go by, the fifty-two year old statewide elected official may be waiting a long time before an opening comes up for a senate seat or the governor's office. He's indicated that these are the only two offices that would tempt him to leave his present post. The new governor could well hold her post for the next eight years, and John Breaux just completed eighteen years in Washington. So Kennedy will have a long wait if he passes on this opportunity.

Kennedy raised over a million dollars in his quest for the governor's race last year. And being no doubt the only statewide name in the race, he should start off in the lead when the first polls are released. The question is whether or not he will be able to make inroads in Washington PAC and Democratic Party fundraising circles. Chris John starts out with an advantage here, and Kennedy will have to work hard to show that he can outdistance John in the months to come. With Jim Bernhard still a contender, there is the possibility the Democratic field could well be a slug fest among several well-financed candidates.

We hear a lot about out-migration from Louisiana. One of the largest groups to leave the state are former members of the Louisiana Congressional delegation. After successful careers in Washington, few members of Congress ever come back home. They normally take advantage of financial opportunities; generally lobbying, or heading up some major national association for a significant income. And you can't begrudge an individual member of Congress from taking advantage of a lucrative new job. But Louisiana is the loser.

Think how better off we would have been if some of the big Louisiana names who retired from Washington would have come back home. Using the wealth of knowledge they obtained, and the national and international contacts they had made to develop business opportunities here in the state. Think how positive it would have been for many of these former congressmen to be actively involved in business and civic opportunities throughout the state. The list is long of Louisianians who never came home. Russell Long, Bennett Johnston, Bob Livingston, Jimmy Hayes, Jerry Huckaby; and now probably John Breaux and Billy Tauzin.

Some did come home, and made an important contribution where they live. Former 5th District Congressman John Cooksey continues to be a prominent eye surgeon in Monroe. Buddy Roemer, after a stint as governor, is a successful developer and banker in Baton Rouge. The former 4th District Congressman Clyde Holloway runs one of the largest commercial landscape nurseries in the south.

I had a nice visit with former Congressman Henson Moore at Coffee Call in Baton Rouge two Sunday's ago. He was visiting for the Christmas holidays. Henson ended a successful fourteen-year career in Congress by loosing a close election for U. S. Senator to John Breaux in 1986. He then was picked to head up the lucrative job as head of the U. S. Forestry Association. But he is about to retire. And the good news is he will be coming back to Louisiana. We practiced law in the same firm together years ago, and he will be a welcome addition to the Baton Rouge community; still young enough to be productive in a number of ways.

Bringing all this talent home could be one pretty good reason to have term limits. Say two terms in the U. S. Senate or four terms in Congress. We would definitely see a lot of talent come back home. The U. S. term limits foundation recently released a poll showing that 74% of Louisiana citizens want term limits to remain in the Louisiana legislature, and support such limits for all elected officials. Something the think about.

A trip to the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans was a real treat for my family like it was for thousands of other Louisianians. A large entourage of family members spent three nights taking in the various Sugar Bowl events, and we stayed at The Hilton Hotel in downtown New Orleans. The Oklahoma football team was there as well as a hotel full of Sooner supporters. Extremely quiet and really polite fans. Quiet a contrast to all of us who are LSU die-hards.

On game day, I was up early and headed down to the first floor restaurant for a 6:30 AM breakfast. Hardly anyone was up and about. As I was taking the elevator to the lobby, the elevator doors opened and a familiar face joined me on the ride down. It was the renowned former Oklahoma coach and Dallas Cowboys coach Barry Switzer.

“Coach, I’m Jim Brown, from here in Louisiana. Obviously, I’m a Tiger fan, but I’ve always been a big admirer of yours.”

“Good to meet you Jim,” he said with a big smile. “Where are you from in Louisiana?”

“A town in Northeast Louisiana called Ferriday. It’s a

“Sure I know where Ferriday is. Heck that ’58 LSU championship team had several Ferriday boys. Max Fugler, Donnie Daye.” He told me he was originally from southern Arkansas, and knew Louisiana as well as he knew Oklahoma.

“Hey, are you the guy who was Insurance Commissioner?” He went on to say that his brother had been Insurance Commissioner in Arkansas, and Deputy Commissioner in Texas. “You see, Jim, we are both a little notorious.”

I laughed and told him history would no doubt paint a much better picture of him than of me. Barry Switzer’s a class guy. And he’s a real hero in Oklahoma.

The morning after LSU’s big victory, Gladys and I had numerous Oklahoma supporters come up to offer their congratulations. It was a real pleasure for us to be surrounded by such decent fans.

“There are many terrible things about his case. The fact that the relentlessly bad behavior of the law enforcement authorities – the use of unreliable witnesses, the illegal withholding of exculpatory material, the refusal to acknowledge clear evidence of innocence – is so ordinary. This sort of thing goes on all the time.”

Bob Hebert
The New York Times

“Feminism was established so as to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of society.”

Rush Limbaugh

Peace and justice to you and your family.

Jim Brown

