

Thursday, January 19th, 2006
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

RECALL THE GOVERNOR?
NO WAY SAY REPUBLICANS

A major effort is being made to recall Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. A website set up to give information about the recall effort received, according to those organizing the effort, some 200,000 hits in the first day alone. Petitions are being circulated, and there is supposedly a major effort underway to obtain the required signatures necessary for a special election. So will the recall be successful? Not a chance!

Two major roadblocks stand in the way of any successful recall of the present Louisiana governor. First is the law itself. And second, would you believe, the Louisiana Republican Party just doesn't want it to happen.

Louisiana legislators have made it near impossible for anyone to be recalled. Under the law on the books, getting an official recall and having a petition put on the ballot requires signatures from at least one-third of the registered voters. Right now, that would mean some 900,000 people would have to sign any recall petition. This all has to be done in 180 days.

Even more difficult is the requirement that every voter who signs the recall petition must list both their ward and precinct where they are registered to vote. How many of you reading this article now know your ward and precinct? This one provision alone gives public officials almost complete immunity.

California Governor Schwarzenegger obtained his present post through a recall of former Governor Greg Davis last year. But in California, a recall effort only needs 12 percent of the last total vote for the office being recalled. If this same rule applied in Louisiana, a recall effort for the governor would only require 168,000 voters rather than the 900,000 that is needed. In addition, in California, there is no requirement for a person signing the recall petition to add their ward and precinct. All that is necessary is a home address.

If the Louisiana legislature were serious in wanting to have a recall option for the state's voters, then the present law should be changed. It's just not realistic to expect a recall to gain the required number of signatures. Lawmakers have set the bar too high. Either change the law to reflect a much lower standard, or abolish any recall provisions altogether.

So what's this about the Republican Party being against any recall effort of the Governor? It's just makes practical, political sense. Don't expect Congressman Bobby Jindal or Senator David Vitter to be signing any recall petition. And the reason is simple. They would rather have the present Governor in office when election time rolls around than what the alternative might be.

Louisiana law differs from that of California and most of the other states that allow recall petitions in the country. If the governor were successfully recalled at a special election, there would be no new election to elect her successor. In the case of Blanco, the present Lieutenant-Governor, Mitch Landrieu, would automatically move up to the top post and serve the remainder of the term. So a recall effort gets rid of Blanco, but gives Landrieu the job for the next two years. Landrieu has stayed out of the fray of criticism, and maintained a fairly positive image through the whole Katrina disaster. When the President made his eleventh visit to New Orleans last week, Governor Blanco was off in The Netherlands inspecting their levy system. Front-page pictures throughout the state showed the President in discussion with Lieutenant-Governor Mitch Landrieu.

Give Landrieu two years as the incumbent, and he would pose a much more difficult challenge for any Republican to knock off. Quite simply, key Republicans would much rather have Blanco on the ballot in 2007 than Landrieu. If Landrieu opts to pass on the New Orleans mayor's race and decides to run for governor, Republicans may have to deal with him anyway. But at least it won't be as an incumbent. He will be one of several challengers in the field.

The recall effort of the present governor will garner its share of publicity in the coming months. It will certainly be an irritant to the Blanco team. Who wants to have to answer questions about being recalled on a regular basis?

But don't count on any success. Legislators set the requirements way too high, and should address this issue one way or the other. And thanks to her loyal opposition, Governor Blanco can expect strong Republican support in opposing any successful recall effort. Politics do arrange strange bed fellows.

POLITICAL MONEY – IT MUST BE EITHER GOOD OR BAD!

There seems to be “selective spasms of morality” going on in Washington these days. Apparently, when members of Congress take campaign contributions, they must split it up into the good stack and bad stack. And if the bad stack starts to be an embarrassment, you just donate the money to charity. All of this soul searching by numerous members of Congress center round Jack Abramoff, the once-powerful lobbyist who is now at the center of a wide-ranging public corruption investigation. Until the recent scandal hit, Abramoff was the toast of the town in the nation's capitol. Many congressmen had carte blanche access for free meals at the restaurant Abramoff owned, as well as tickets for Redskins' football games. And the campaign contributions flowed like water. One hundred and thirty members of Congress, including most of the Louisiana congressional delegation, benefited from Abramoff's generosity.

His biggest client was the Coushatta Indian Tribe in Louisiana, which paid Abramoff's lobbying firm some \$32 million. In 2002, he was able to get 33 members of Congress to

sign a letter urging the Bush administration to block a proposal for an Indian tribe to build a casino in Louisiana that would compete with the Coushatta's. But once his star plummeted and he became a persona non grata, members of Congress rushed to give away the tainted money to a favorite charity.

Now this I don't get. How does contributing the tainted money to any charity constitute "returning" the contributions? This rush to refund the money seems to be misguided. It's too late to claim any vigilance against the suspect contributions. Political money just doesn't stick out in categories of black or white. There are many areas of grey, and any observers are being naïve not to assume that there are implied expectations that anyone receiving such money must consider. And it's just not that the Indian money is suspect. The same reasoning applies to many other lobbying groups in Washington. What about the pharmaceutical industry that poured millions of dollars into the political coffers of members of Congress, and ended up with a prescription drug law that barred Medicare from bargaining for lower drug prices? Are these contributions any different than Abramoff's?

When you receive campaign contributions, you put a burden on those officials who get the money to use their judgment in balancing contributors' priorities against those of the public interest. If you have questions about the money, just don't take it to begin with. And if you do take it and later find out you made a mistake, give it back to those who gave it to you.

Giving questionable campaign money to charity is like buying indulgences for the political inquisition we know will come when election time comes around. You may not believe it, but the Louisiana legislature has much more strict rules governing lobbyists and how money is contributed than do members of Congress in Washington. Maybe the Abramoff scandal will be the catalyst to change the rules on lobbying activities. But don't count on it.

T-Shirt of the week sold in New Orleans:

*"I stayed in New Orleans for Katrina and all I got was the lousy T-Shirt,
a New Cadillac and a Plasma TV."*

Quote from a new employee of Playboy magazine:

*"Playboy is a great environment for women to work in.
It's really not that much different from working at an insurance company."*

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown