

Thursday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **NUMEROUS ELECTIONS ON THE FRONT BURNER!**

In a normal election cycle, 2006 would be a somewhat dull election year with a contested congressional election or two. Not a lot to spark the average voter's interest. But no more. Get ready for a whole litany of contests, from possible three statewide elections, to a series of hot congressional matches as well as citywide races in New Orleans. Anything but dull this year.

On the statewide front, Louisiana voters will be forced to go to the polls three times this fall to elect both statewide officials and members of Congress. Initially, a special election for Secretary of State was set at the regular congressional date this November. The fall date was originally scheduled for October, but federal Judge Frank Polozola started meddling again (as he often does.) Because of Louisiana's unique open primary system, Polozola required in a recent ruling that the first primary date be moved to November to put Louisiana congressional elections on the same footing as closed primary races throughout the rest of the country.

But though Polozola has authority to rule on federal elections, the state election date was put into state law by the legislature. So the first primary for the state special election will take place on September 30<sup>th</sup>, with a runoff, if needed, on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The November date will also be the first primary for the congressional races, with any runoff taking place on December 9<sup>th</sup>. Confused? So is everyone else.

Look for an effort to be made in the coming legislative sessions to consolidate the September election date into the November date. This would save both money (some \$2 million) and effort.

Former Republican Party chairman Mike Francis, from Crowley, has confirmed he is running for Secretary of State and indicates he will spend a substantial sum of his own money. Always an important factor in a race where campaign funds are hard to come by. Francis was at odds with former Governor Mike Foster when the then Governor held court, but the Francis camp is saying they have patched up there differences. Francis is associated with the religious right, a strong factor in the state Republican Party.

Republican Senator Jay Dardenne is also in the SOS race, and has been actively raising campaign dollars from past supporters. Dardenne, always a good fundraiser, hopes to keep Francis on the far right, and appeal to more moderate republicans, as well as democrats. Both are solid candidates, and this presents problems for state party officials who had hoped to field one major candidate in each statewide office.

Rumors surfaced this week that Public Service Commissioner and former Senator Foster Campbell (democrat) also has an interest in this race. He would like to run for Governor, and has not ruled out such a race in 2007. But he's keeping his options open with this race as a possible backup. Campbell begins a statewide radio blitz next week urging Governor Blanco to add an oil processing tax, his issue for years, to the upcoming February special session.

And finally, Baton Rouge Senator Sharon Broom, a former local TV personality, has also expressed an interest in this race. Broom, a democrat, is not term limited in her present post, so she has a free shot at a statewide office and can still be able to run for re-election in 2007. Look for both her and Dardenne to be pushing election reform issues in the coming special and regular sessions of the legislature.

And how about the Insurance Commissioner's race? Rumors have been flying all week that incumbent Robert Wooley will resign in the coming weeks and take a job with a Baton Rouge law firm. Newly appointed first assistant Jim Donelon would take over and be primed to run in the fall. Donelon is a former state representative who served as chairman of the House Insurance Committee before joining the Insurance department. He may well face present Senate Insurance Committee Chairman James David Cain, who has been traveling the state and raising money for the past year. Count on a number of other candidates to give this office a good look.

And what about rumors flying around Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu? Sources close to him say he has all but decided to enter the New Orleans Mayor's race. Qualifications open in less than a month with the first primary being April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Landrieu becomes the immediate front runner if he qualifies as perception problems continue to mount for incumbent Mayor Ray Nagin. (Go to <http://www.jimbrownla.com> to see the latest Nagin "chocolate cartoons).

What happens if Landrieu wins and vacates his present office? Gov. Blanco can appoint his replacement to finish out the term, but the appointment has to be confirmed by a majority of legislators. Get ready for a donnybrook here. The person appointed has a leg up for a full term election a year later, so there is a lot at stake. Look for republican legislators to play a heavy hand in any confirmation process and possibly oppose Blanco's choice as a way of weakening the Governor in advance of her own re-election efforts in 2007.

Also take note that a new appointed Lt. Governor cannot succeed to the Governor's office in case of a vacancy. The successor must be elected. So the next Secretary of State could move up to first in line of succession. Good talking point here to raise money for this less colorful office.

We will take a look at the congressional races in the weeks to come. In the meantime, both political parties elect a chairman in the coming days. Republican Party chairman Roger Villere is a lock for re-election at the party caucus February 4<sup>th</sup>. And the democrats pick a new chairman this Saturday.

Baton Rouge lawyer and longtime democratic official Chris Whittington looks to be the front runner against St. James Parish Attorney Paul Aucoin and former Shreveport councilman Larry Ferdinand. But Aucoin reportedly has the support of both the Governor and the Landrieu faction. Why? Because he supposedly has agreed to serve for only a year and then step down. Party big wigs want him to warm the seat until their first choice is available at the end of this year.

So who's the first choice? Will the current Secretary of State finish his term in December then move over to this spot? Not if Whittington has anything to say about it. Stay tuned.

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"If I would do another 'Terminator' movie I would have Terminator travel back in time and tell Arnold not to have a special election." --California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

Jim Brown's weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim's Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus read his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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