

February 5, 2004  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **THE MEDIA RUNS FOR COVER**

Public officials are always held responsible by the media when something goes wrong under their watch. If a subordinate gets into trouble, or a program goes broke, the top official is held accountable. And that's the way it should be. But when Janet Jackson exposed her breast during the Super Bowl halftime show, boy did the local CBS television affiliates run for cover.

President Bush is ultimately going to be responsible for whatever happens in Iraq, particularly considering the fact that they won't find weapons of mass destruction. It looks like he got bum advice, but the blame goes to the top. When I ran the Secretary of State's office and the Department of Insurance, I was responsible for a screw up of even the lowest paid employee. The same goes for anyone working for the Governor and every other elected official. That's what accountability is all about.

But did you see the buck passing that took place following Janet's exposure? The NFL disavowed any responsibility and threw the ball to CBS. CBS denied any knowledge, and pointed a finger at MTV, who produced the show. And the local affiliates? They all backed away saying they have no say-so over what is televised nationally.

No one wanted to talk about all of the other tasteless incidents that happened during the Super Bowl. The crotch grabbing by Justin Timberlake and P Diddy, the sexual gyrating by numerous dancers on the stage. And of course the commercials. The commercials that covered everything from erectile dysfunction to the dog that bites the man on the crotch. I guess this is viewed as good wholesome entertainment for a family-oriented event like the Super Bowl.

Television affiliates hold a public license. They have a public responsibility and are accountable just as public officials. If program content is offensive to local standards, we should expect the local CBS affiliates to step up to the plate and see that changes are made. Not the buck passing we observed last weekend.

Local affiliates can be fined up to \$27,000.00 by the FCC when program content crosses the line. The Commission can determine that, in fact, there is local accountability. With all of the public outcry, it will be interesting to see what action is taken by the FCC.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two old friends passed away in recent weeks. They both played a prominent role in the politics of Louisiana.

Chris Faser took me under wing when I came to Baton Rouge in 1971 as a new State Senator. He was then and remained a confidante and close advisor and friend to Governor Jimmy Davis until the day he died.

Chris was unique in a number of ways. He served in both the Louisiana legislature as well as the Mississippi legislature. And every time Jimmy Davis ran for office, Chris was there managing his campaign and running the governor's office during the two times Davis headed the state.

When I came to Baton Rouge in the 70's, Chris managed both the Capitol House and the Bellemont Hotels. They were the two gathering points for the legislature after hours. When I was Insurance Commissioner, Chris would come by several times a year to ask a favor. Governor Davis was pretty much homebound by then and Chris asked if I could go by Davis' house, located right in the back of the present Governor's Mansion, and spend a little time with the Governor. Of course, I always obliged.

Chris, Jimmy Davis, and I would spend an hour or so reminiscing about fond political memories going back many years. Then the Governor would pull out some small document he needed notarized, and asked me if I could take care of it. It was always an enjoyable experience. I was proud to have been Jimmy Davis' personal notary.

When Jimmy Davis ran his final (unsuccessful) campaign for governor in 1971, he and Chris toured throughout north Louisiana where I was a candidate for state senator. The Governor would roll in on his bus, set up a large platform with his back-up band and serenade the crowd. Chris would always motion me up on the stage and the Governor would introduce me as the next state senator. Then he would strike a cord on his guitar, and take off singing his version of "The Red Nightgown Blues."

Chris was active until the day he died. He was an institution around the Capitol, and he will be missed by many of us who were touched and nurtured by his knowledge and friendship.

Luke Petrovich also passed away last week. He was a legend in Plaquemines Parish as a man who brought down the Perez regime.

Luke started out as the lawyer and close friend to Judge Leander Perez who controlled Plaquemines Parish politics for decades going back to the 1920's. Governors then did

very little without first checking with Judge Perez. And Luke was his right hand man. But Luke fell out with the Perez family when he learned of the profits made on parish land from oil leases. Luke felt betrayed, and became a major opponent to the Perez organization. He teamed up with the Hingle family (my brother-in-law Jiff is now the Sheriff there), and formed the anti-Perez group that opposed the Judge's sons, Leander and Chalin, for many years thereafter.

I did legal work for Luke when he became Parish President in the late 1980's. His life was certainly not without controversy and he took his share of hits. But as the history books are written about the downside of the Perez dynasty, Luke Petrovich will be remembered as the man who started it all.

\*\*\*\*\*

Martha Stewart got a break this week that I wish yours truly had received. The Federal Judge overseeing her case in New York chastised federal prosecutors for "withholding information that might undermine the credibility" of the key witnesses against Stewart.

If their job is to find out the truth, why do these prosecutors fight so hard to keep hidden key information about exactly what happened in the case? Whatever happens to Martha Stewart, all the evidence should be out on the table. I can speak from personal experience that this always doesn't happen.

\*\*\*\*\*

Another suggestion to the legislature. Do something to protect us from Mad Cow Disease.

This disease, that worries millions of Europeans, has now come into the United States. Actually, it's called Human Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), and over a thousand Americans are expected to develop it this year. And its reoccurrence is being monitored throughout the country by the National Disease Pathology Surveillance Center in Cleveland. In most of the southern states, including all of the states surrounding Louisiana, doctors are required to report any instance of Mad Cow Disease. But no such requirement here.

Louisiana has an additional problem with the large number of deer located in the state. A new disease outbreak points to deer that have been found to suffer from chronic wasting disease, a brain malady similar to CJD. With deer hunting so popular in Louisiana, this is just one more reason why any instance of the disease should be reported and monitored.

The legislature should require what is in effect in Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi. You cannot protect the public without proper monitoring of a problem that is now growing throughout our country. Sometimes the bureaucrats pile too many laws on us. But in this case, it is just the kind of information we need to know.

\*\*\*\*\*

*A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul.*

George Bernard Shaw

*Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you.*

Pericles (430 B.C.)

Peace and Justice to you and your family.

Jim Brown