

Thursday, February 19, 2004

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **THIRD DISTRICT CONGRESSIONAL RACE TO BE A BARN BURNER**

The Third Congressional District makes up the heart and soul of “deep” south Louisiana. With incumbent Billy Tauzin retiring and maybe even stepping down before the present term ends, this race is shaping up as the most crowded and interesting of all the Congressional races on the ballot this fall.

Each week there seems to be names of more potential candidates being floated throughout the district. Look for as many as a dozen qualifiers to jump into this race before all is said and done. There is a cross section of present elected officials, former elected officials, as well as the old and the new. The district stretches from the tip of Plaquemines Parish, the most southern part of the state, through deep south Louisiana, rising almost to I-10 just south of Lafayette. There are small communities in this district where the only language for some residents is Cajun, and the daily specials on chalk board signs outside grocery stores and restaurants are written in French.

No one favorite jumps out in this race, and a contender can possibly make the runoff with as little as 15% of the vote. Therefore, a strong regional “hometown” base will be critical for any candidate hoping to make one of the two top spots.

You can find potential candidates almost evenly spread out from the tip of the district in Plaquemines right on up to Lafayette. In fact, if you flew over the district and dropped a crawfish out the window every 50 miles, a potential contender would be there, no doubt ready to pontificate on the dangers of Chinese imported crawfish and Mexican sugar. Protectionism is big stuff in this district.

Here is a run-down on those who could go to the post starting at the southern end of the district:

1. Benny Roussell – Parish President of Plaquemines, and former state representative. Roussell is a Democrat. He may be boxed in by other candidates because his base is so far south, and will have a hard time growing north. He will be opposed by Plaquemines Parish Sheriff Jiff Hingle because of a political falling out over the building of a new jail (a disclaimer - Jiff Hingle is my brother-in-law).
2. Reggie Dupre (Democrat) - the state senator is a lawyer and an effective legislator. Sometimes he can be underestimated, but if he can raise the money, he has a shot at the runoff.

3. Hunt Downer – the former House Speaker, of Houma, will start off as the best known candidate in the race because of his recent run for Governor. He is supposedly Tauzin’s choice to replace him, and one of two Republicans being mentioned in the race so far. Although the race has a long way to go, Downer will start off as a favorite for one of the two runoff spots. However, party affiliation may not mean as much in this district, and he will be in regional competition with Dupre and the next candidate on the list.
4. Charlie Melancon - a former state representative from Napoleonville, “Charlie Boy” has been dealing with Washington issues for years as President of the American Sugar Cane League. Since sugar is such a big issue in the district, he will have a drum to beat, and possibly can use his past contacts to raise money. Can he find a niche beyond the Assumption parish area to build a base for a runoff spot?
5. Marty Chabert – the former state senator remains politically active, and serves on the LSU Board of Supervisors. The Chabert name has been a part of the political fiber throughout Terrebonne and Lafourche for a number of years. Few senators ever individually touched the lives of so many people in their districts as did Marty’s dad, former Senator Leonard Chabert. He will have his own financial resources, and friends to call on. Again, the problem comes with the crowd. Are there too many candidates around the Terrebonne area?
6. Jane Triche – Like the Chabert family in Terrebonne, the Triche family political traditions go way back in the Napoleonville – Assumption parish area. Jane Triche is a respected lawyer in Napoleonville. She’s the daughter of a Louisiana legislative icon, “Pappy” Triche. He was the floor leader in the House of Representatives for both Jimmy Davis and John McKeithen. Everyone who followed the legislature back then has a good Pappy Triche story to tell. Jane Triche was at the Washington Mardi Gras Ball this past weekend, and is seriously considering the race.
7. Nicky Monica – the St. John Parish President is the other Republican name emerging. Monica served on the parish council, beat the former parish president in last year’s election, and oversees political activities in one of the larger parishes in the district. Monica worked the Washington crowd hard this weekend at the annual Mardi Gras Ball. Can he raise the more than half million dollars it will take to get into the runoff?
8. Jack Smith – A Democrat from St. Mary Parish (Berwick). Smith has served several terms in the state legislature as a representative. He is popular in Baton Rouge and throughout his district. The big advantage he has is having most of the northern part of the congressional district to himself. If he can consolidate a regional base that brings in Iberia and parts of St. Martin, Smith could be a strong contender for a runoff spot.

This congressional race will be expensive. Any viable candidate will have to spend heavily on media markets in both Lafayette and New Orleans. Cable TV advertising can be effectively used in a district like this as well as radio. This district has become more conservative. A smart candidate will remember how effectively Bobby Jindal used radio in this part of the state.

What's the main issue in this deep part of south Louisiana? Being ignored. Neither Democrats nor Republicans are giving much attention to needs in this district. A candidate can argue that the district has done a heck of a lot more for the country than Washington has done for the district. Very few districts in America are as wealthy in the natural resources that are produced and can be found throughout this coastal area. Obviously, huge quantities of oil and gas. But much of the nation's seafood comes from this district. It also produces more sulphur than any place in America. Yet it seems to be regularly "slapped around".

There is a major push in Washington to drastically limit flood insurance throughout this area. The Corps of Engineers has channeled more and more water that has no place else to go. And oil company canals have undermined natural barriers to flooding throughout this district. Homes are often severely damaged in this part of the state. Message from Congress? Maybe they should move. Hey, this is not south Florida or California where people build recreational homes! You've got to live where you work. If you produce in the oil, gas, sulphur, and seafood industries, you've got to be in close proximity. We don't hear much about these products being produced in Iowa. If the company is going to get the benefit of all this production, you've got to protect the people that "live where they work".

More advice to the candidates. Don't be a "knee-jerk" Republican or Democrat. Again, neither party has served this district well. I've written about the federal formulas that vastly discriminate against Louisiana. The lack of a "fair share" of federal highway funds is one of the reasons I-49 has not been continued through the district. Residents in the Third District, as well as in the rest of the state, continue to be short-changed on federal Medicare, Medicaid and nursing home reimbursement funds. (For details, see December 17, 2003, column).

If you want to be the Congressman from the Third District, again don't get sucked in to the "one issue mentality" emanating from both the national parties. All the Republicans want to talk about is terrorism. Don't worry about any domestic agenda. If you second guess any aspects of the war, then you are un-American. That's all we should care about. Hummmm.

The Democrats aren't much better. It's class distinction. The rich versus the poor. Tax increases versus tax cuts. Pitting one economic group against the other.

That ain't going to fly in the Third District, and shouldn't anywhere else in the state. Bring it back home fellas and Jane. Focus on the quality of life you should be living

in south Louisiana and how you have been short-changed. There's a base to build here, and if you do, you just may be in the runoff.

Then if you win, you can become a knee-jerk Democrat or Republican. You can go to Washington and start being a "one issue" representative like everyone else seems to be up there.

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### **Martha Stewart Update**

If Martha Stewart is found innocent of the charges against her for making false statements to an FBI agent, she should do one thing everyday. Pray and thank the Good Lord that she was not tried in the Middle District (Baton Rouge) in Louisiana. Last Friday's New York Times (February 13) reported just what happened in the courtroom.

*In front of jurors Friday, Stewart's defense tried to call into question the accuracy of notes taken by an FBI agent at Stewart's two interviews with investigators, in February and April 2002.*

*Special agent Catherine Farmer's notes are the only record of the interviews, and Stewart's statements at the meetings form the basis for the government's accusations that she lied.*

*Farmer took notes on the meetings, then typed routine summaries of them, called the FBI 302 reports, based on her notes and memory.*

*In Stewart's interview on February 4, 2002, Farmer's 302 report shows Stewart claimed she did not know whether there was a record at her office of a call from Bacanovic on the day she sold her ImClone stock.*

*But under questioning from Stewart lawyer John Tigue, Farmer conceded the information in the 302 report – written immediately after the interview – came from her memory only and did not appear in her notes.*

*"It's possible to miss important things." Tigue (the defense counsel) asked the agent.*

*"Yes, the case was just assigned," Farmer replied.*

*Prosecutor Karen Patton Seymour, trying to preserve the credibility of Farmer's testimony, pointed out in questioning that the FBI always relies on notes in its voluntary interviews.*

Do you get my jest? Martha Stewart's lawyers effectively used the handwritten notes of the FBI agent, pointing out that testimony the agent gave did not appear in her notes. She was fortunate to have the "whole story" set out for the jury to consider.

You see Martha, you would not have gotten the notes in Middle District of Louisiana. It would have been your word against the FBI agent. We all trust our government. And the agent would never "add things you said" to the contemporaneous notes that were taken at the time of your interview. Right!

Good for you Martha. You were a lot luckier than anyone who would be tried in the Middle District, Federal Court, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Just thank your lucky stars.

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### **Janet Jackson Update**

Less than twenty-four hours after Janet Jackson dominated the Superbowl, a Congressional committee called for a full investigation of decency requirements supposedly regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Less than twenty-four hours. These members of Congress really know how to move quickly on a major problem facing the nation.

Yet when it came to investigating how 9-11 could have happened, or whether or not weapons of mass destruction ever really existed, months, years have gone by, and we are still "talking" about "starting" an investigation. Kudos to the U. S. Congress. They really know how to put the priorities in order. Now we know where the boobs really are.

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*"I don't make jokes I just watch the Congress and report the facts."*

Will Rogers

*"If the whole human race lay in one grave, the epitaph on its headstone might well be: 'It Seemed a Good Idea at the Time.'"*

Historian Rebecca West

Peace and Justice to you and your family.

Jim Brown.