

Thursday, April 2, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

A MAJOR SHAKEOUT IN THE THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

A new Democratic candidate announces today in the Third Congressional District that takes in all of deep south Louisiana. She comes out with big political guns behind her, and solid fundraising credentials. And on the Republican side, the magic of the Tauzin name is evidenced by a new poll in the race.

Charmaine Degruise Caccioppi may not be a household name, but she enters the Third District race today with more experience in Washington and better Democratic connections than any other candidate who has announced so far. The Lafourche native will announce her candidacy at the St. Bernard Parish Courthouse in Chalmette at 11:00 AM this morning, and will follow up with a second announcement at 3:30 PM to be held at Central Lafourche High School where she graduated.

Former U. S. Senator Bennett Johnston will introduce and endorse her at both locations. She worked for the Senator, both in Louisiana and Washington, for over twenty years, and his daughter, Mary Johnston, will serve as Caccioppi's fundraising chairman. In addition, former Congresswoman and Ambassador Lindy Boggs will be actively supporting her. Caccioppi also spent a year working for Senator Mary Landrieu, and has worked for five years with Metro Vision in New Orleans. So she is well connected throughout the district, and hopes this will lead to significant fundraising opportunities.

A recent poll completed this week, and paid for by an association out of Washington, shows the magic of the Tauzin name in the district. Over 30% of the voters say they initially favor Billy Tauzin, III. His name recognition soars above 80%. But most observers figure that voters are confused, with many thinking that they are passing judgment on the current congressman; not his son. The other candidates, both Republican and Democrat, linger in single digits. That's why Caccioppi, with her broad-based political support, thinks she has growing room to build throughout the district.

As other polls are taken and become public, look for the potential candidates to zero in on young Tauzin. "This ain't the ole man, and nobody is gonna inherit this job!" That will no doubt be the battle cry.

Caccioppi astutely hired political operatives Val Marmillion and Rannah Gray as her political consultants and to produce her media. Marmillion has regularly handled Senator John Breaux's campaigns, and was called in during the second primary to booster the Landrieu campaign against the on-slaught of Suzie Terrell. The Marmillion-Gray team also handled Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu's successful campaign, as well as producing TV spots for Governor Blanco's runoff victory. So with the Johnston, Landrieu, Breaux and Boggs connections, Caccioppi starts off looking awfully good on

paper. With eleven potential candidates being talked about at the present time, and who knows who else will emerge in the future, voters in the Third District will be bumping into contenders on every street corner. This race is obviously wide open.

Speaking of Suzie Terrell, word in the Second District (Cong. David Vitter's present district) is that the former Commissioner of Elections is making calls sounding out a potential Republican challenge against front-runner Bobby Jindal. The same Washington poll shows Jindal running away with the Second District race. Terrell feels she still has some capital to spare after losing her recent Attorney General race. Her best vote came in the Second District, and she is "testing the waters" to see what kind of support may be out there for her second attempt at going to Washington, after a close race for U. S. Senate two years ago.

I'm a big Lance Armstrong fan. He is the best biker in the world, and I stay glued to the television for the Tour de France each summer. I hope he wins his sixth straight Tour de France this year. But is he one of the reasons I pay 37 cents for a postage stamp?

Since 1996, the United States Postal Service has been shelling out big bucks to sponsor Lance and the U. S. Cycle team. Seven million dollars a year. So that a hand full of guys can ride up and down mountains. And not in this country, you know. Half-way around the world.

When postal service officials were asked about the propriety of such an expenditure, they responded by talking about worker morale, and what *The New York Times* calls "the identification that the average postal worker makes with Armstrong and his teammates as they sweep to victory, year after year, in the world's most publicized bicycle race."

So I brought up the subject, when I went by my local post office this week. "Morale seems pretty good around here – has Lance made a difference?"

"Lance who?" the guy behind the counter said to me with a puzzling look.

"You know - Lance Armstrong. He's supposed to be helping to build morale with you guys."

"What route does he work? Is he in the south zone, or does he work north Baton Rouge?"

"No, no, you know this guy. He rides a bike up and down mountains to make your day brighter, and give you more incentive to handle my mail. You know who I'm talking about."

“Never heard of the guy. We don’t get real excited about much around here anyway.”

Advice to the post office. Cheer on Lance like I do. But hang on to the \$7 million this year. Add this to other such “questionable” expenditures, then cut a penny or so off of the cost of my stamp. That would certainly help my morale.

Have you been following any of the Tyco International trial in New York? It seems that a week does not go by when there is a major trial, involving high profile defendants, where judicial decisions made are directly opposite of what takes place here in Louisiana.

Last week, the jurors in the Tyco case asked to hear testimony given at the trial by the two defendants, Dennis Kozlowski and Mark Swartz. In addition, the jury asked for other testimony to be made available to them so that they could weigh all of the evidence in a fair and balanced way. And the Judge, rightfully, made the information available to the jury. But not so in Louisiana.

When I was tried in the Western District of Louisiana, the jury in my case sent a note to the judge saying they would like to have a copy of my testimony. The judge’s response was that my “testimony on the stand is not available.” It had not been transcribed, and could not be given to the jury. The jurors could have been excused for the evening, and the court reporter could have transcribed what I said overnight and had it ready to give to the jury the next day.

Even more disturbing is the fact that the actual transcript of my testimony was available on the court reporter’s computer, which is referred to as “Realtime Production.” All the court reporter had to do was print out her transcription, and my testimony would be available to the jury.

Again, the rules are different if you live in Louisiana.

As of the time that this column is being posted, the jurors in the Tyco case seem to have reached an impasse because one of the jurors is staunchly holding out for acquittal. If the judge in New York merely followed the example in Louisiana, the solution would be simple. Just kick off the jury the one juror who believes the defendants are innocent. That takes care of that problem. If you recall, that’s exactly what happened in the Edwards case.

I wrote recently about the differences between the Martha Stewart trial and what happened to me in Louisiana, and now we have the Tyco case. It should be obvious to any neutral observer that there are two systems of justice. One for the rest of the country. And one for Louisiana. It’s a shame we are not one of the other forty-nine. Some of us paid quiet a price.

There is no happiness, there is no liberty, there is no enjoyment of life, unless a man can say when he rises in the morning, he shall be subject to the decisions of no unjust judge today.

--Daniel Webster

A jury consists of twelve persons chosen to decide who has the better lawyer.

--Robert Frost

Peace and justice to you and your family,

Jim Brown