

Thursday, May 18th, 2006
New Orleans, Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS MAYOR'S RACE GOES DOWN TO THE WIRE

The polls in New Orleans open up in less than 48 hours. And by Saturday night, we will know the results of one of the most watched and scrutinized mayor's races in the country. When the smoke settles and all of the votes are cast, whoever wins will not just be "the Man" in New Orleans, but will also have a significant influence on the next Louisiana Governor's Race just a little over a year away.

There is more than just passing interest in this race by both Governor Kathleen Blanco and First District Congressman Bobby Jindal. The next mayor of the State's largest city can and no doubt will have a major impact on garnering support for one of these two officials in the 2006 Gubernatorial Election. Here's how the flowchart works.

In the last Governor's Race, incumbent Mayor Ray Nagin supported Bobby Jindal over eventual winner, Blanco. The relationship between the Governor and the Mayor has always been lukewarm at best, and much has been written about their deteriorating relationship that took place post-Katrina. Jindal has made no public endorsement, and "officially" is staying out of the race.

But if you look at the major financial contributors on the Mayor's recent campaign financial disclosure reports, you will note a number of key Republicans sympathetic to Jindal who will more than likely be active supporters of the Congressman in the next governor's race led by New Orleans developer Joe Canizaro. Not only is he a Jindal supporter, but Canizaro heads the "Bring Back New Orleans" Commission appointed by the Mayor. He and a number of other major contributors to Nagin, including shipbuilding magnet Boisie Bollinger, all have a close relationship with Jindal, and some observers feel like Jindal will again benefit if the Mayor is re-elected.

On the other side of the coin, a number of operatives around the Governor have recently moved into the Landrieu camp. The Governor and her second in line have never had a close relationship in Baton Rouge. There have even been some fairly strong disagreements on who had authority to run several boards and commissions. But that is all in the past as the Governor looks toward 2007. Publicly, she has made no comments. But key Blanco financial contributors have recently come to the Landrieu camp.

Also advising behind the scenes is Blanco's media advisor Ray Tedley. His presence giving advice to the Landrieu team is further evidence of the Governor's desire to have Landrieu elected. As one observer close to the scene commented, "Ray Tedley doesn't take a shower in the morning without checking in with Coach Blanco (the Governor's husband). He is working for Landrieu, and you can bet he is being directed to do so by the Governor."

A victory by Landrieu helps the Governor in several ways. First of all, she is able to patch up her differences, and hopefully, have an ally in her camp when she runs for re-election next year. Secondly, if Landrieu steps down as Lieutenant-Governor, Blanco gets to name his replacement.

One would assume that the Governor's choice would be a Democrat who would be easily confirmed by both Houses of the Legislature, and work as a team with her in a joint re-election effort when election time rolls around.

Who is in the running for her to pick? By the Governor's own admission, she has received more than 80 requests for the job. At the top tier of her long list, right now at least, are former Senate President Randy Ewing, Secretary of State Al Ater, former Congressman Chris John and Department of Natural Resources Secretary Scott Angelle. Recent rumors have added to the list Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee, who flirted with his own run for governor in 1995. Then the list goes on and on.

Look for the Landrieu campaign to keep pounding on the Mayor for not developing a viable Hurricane Evacuation Plan. And there is certainly plenty of reason to pound. If you want to read over the Mayor's vision of how people get out of the city, go to the New Orleans website at www.cityofno.com. There you will see a bare bones skeleton outline that is little more than two pages. The Mayor calls for the use of trains to evacuate. But the railroads have said that this is impractical and not possible. He also calls for the use of buses from the local transit authority. The Authority recently filed bankruptcy. And when I called the number listed on the Mayor's site for help and additional information, (504) 565-7200, the message stated that the "number is not in service." Note to the Mayor. Your plan needs some work.

Despite the Mayor's numerous missteps (post-Katrina stumblings, chocolate city, no evacuation plan), he still has a shot. For whatever reason, he is raising a fair amount of money. But Landrieu received a major boost this week by receiving the endorsement of the Times Picayune. They endorsed Nagin four years ago. The numbers though work better for Landrieu. That is, if the vote he is expecting actually shows up. That is a big if for both candidates.

Whatever the outcome, this will be an election that will be talked about for years to come. Wanna know the winner? I'll tell you about 10 o'clock this Saturday night.

WHO WON THE ELECTION?

So give me your honest opinion. Was the election fixed? Was there a conspiracy theory to rig the final outcome? What I am asking is ... Did Chris get a raw deal?

If you don't know what I am talking about, then you are not one of the 50 million Americans who were glued to the T.V. set this past Tuesday for American Idol. If you missed your chance to vote, and didn't follow the suspense, overwhelming favorite Chris Daughtry was voted off this popular T.V. show. And boy, are his fans mad. You can go online to www.PetitionOnline.com where thousands of people are signing up demanding a recount.

Many outraged fans of Chris' say the vote was rigged. When they dialed the special number to vote for Daughtry, they were greeted by a recorded message for "Idol" singer Katharine McPhee, thanking the caller for voting for her. Thousands of fans are emailing and calling and complaining the election was not fair, and should be held again.

New York radio talk show host Maria Milito explained it this way: “You’ve got to understand that to many American Idol fans, voting for their favorite performer is just as important as voting for President of the United States. Even more so.”

Well, I guess she has a point. Forget the Mayor’s election this Saturday. But be sure and sign the recall petition for Chris. It really must be important.

INTERESTING OBSERVATION OF THE WEEK:

“Let me get this straight. We cannot find the world’s most infamous terrorist in the barren tribal areas of Pakistan. The F.B.I. is years away from upgrading its computer systems to allow agents to search its own terrorism files. Yet we are sorting through the telephone records of millions of Americans looking for ‘evidence’ of terrorist activity?”

Column in The New York Times
May 13th, 2006

*“We always want the best man to win an **election**. Unfortunately, he never runs.”*

~ Will Rogers

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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