

Thursday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **LOUISIANA'S TWO TOP FEMS DODGE THE BULLET**

In the Broadway hit, "Guys and Dolls", Sky Masterson sings "Luck Be a Lady Tonight" just before throwing the winning dice roll. Well Louisiana's two top Democrats were "the" lucky ladies this week, and both dodged what could have been a major crisis for each in their respective arenas. The question is: will their good luck be short term, or will events of this week carry enough political capital to let them roll on for awhile?

First the Governor. How sweet it is to have some \$360 million blessings just seem to fall from the sky. One day, the money crunch seems almost insurmountable. The next day, it's hundreds of millions of, not rain drops, but pennies from heaven. Enough to more than double the promised teachers' pay raise and take care of a number of other financial needs, all with just a little help from an increased cigarette tax. Can you blame her for smiling and giving a "thumbs up" all over the state capitol?

No one seemed particularly bothered as to how the Revenue Estimating Conference, that by law is supposed to stay current on how much tax revenue is being generated, just happened to stumble across an additional \$360 million they didn't know existed. In speeches I've made throughout the state in recent months, invariably the question is asked: why is there not more money coming into the state treasury because of rising oil prices? So the average guy on the street knew there was more money available, but not these so-called "state experts." I'm sure glad these folks aren't looking after my meager income.

But be as it may, the Guv now has the "bucks" and finds herself in the enviable position of being able to take care of numerous perceived financial stumbling blocks. Even dollars to cover what's owed to both the Saints and the Hornets: that is unless the legislature now decides to renege on what was almost unanimous support just a few years ago.

And what's this fuss about Gov. Blanco's concerns that: "They're going to attack me personally because this plan hits in their vast profits." How do you attack this lady personally? Do you call her names? Do you criticize her hair-do? Say she wears too much red? Her husband is a lousy dancer? Come on. She has never been much of a lightning rod for personal controversy. Must be just good politics to "gear up for the attack," real or envisioned.

She should be able to pull this \$2500 pay raise off. But then the real test comes. If you review all the proposed new laws offered by the entire legislature, there is

virtually nothing that deals with more accountability and higher standards. We read nationally and locally, week after week, about "No Child Left Behind." And rightly so, particularly Louisiana, where there exists such a large number of underprivileged children. But rarely does any elected official, or for that matter any educator, raise the question about what more we can be doing for our "best and brightest." With more pay in the system, more accountability will be called for, and rightly so. More on that next week.

And the other lucky lady? Well, at least for awhile during the process, Senator Mary Landrieu, of course. Just a week ago, she was on the sidelines of the judicial filibuster debate, taking flack from both sides. Even her Louisiana colleague, Republican David Vitter, took the ungentlemanly tack of publicly criticizing her on the floor of the Senate, demanding that she take a stronger public position on the filibuster.

This whole cat fight (is it a dog fight or a cat fight when women are involved? Am I politically correct? ) has been billed as a Herculean showdown involving a great clash of basic democratic principles with the very foundation set out by the founding fathers (wasn't there a founding mother or two?) in jeopardy. Did you get excited?

So what happened? Well, some Bush nominees get filibustered, some don't. Then the Democrats made an avowed promise to use "weapons of mass discussion" only in "extreme circumstances," which frankly can mean anything they want it to mean. So everybody declares victory, and, for all practical purposes, we are right back at square one.

So right after the dust settles, everyone wants to know: who are the winners? Well, let's take a look.

Landrieu, with luck, started out pretty well this week. She made a good move in joining up with the dirty dozen plus two, the bipartisan group of seven Republicans and seven Democrats that hammered out the final compromise. It's hard now for the local GOP to bash her too much when strong conservatives like South Carolina's Lindsey Graham were also part of the group. Landrieu went from an uncommitted sideliner to a perceived problem solver by joining up with this motley conglomeration of backbenchers (John McCain being the exception) who left the leadership of both parties standing on the sidelines looking inept. Although she had little to lose by joining the centralist group, she still took the initiative, and came away as being a problem solver. This whole "nuclear showdown" looked to be a plus for Landrieu's stature.

Vitter, initially, looked petty in attacking Landrieu on the floor of the senate when he accused her of not taking a strong stand. Landrieu tried to retake the initiative by signing up with the middle of the road crowd and portray Vitter as merely watching all the action on the sidelines. And she did a pretty good job. So score one for Landrieu.

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But then Landrieu joined eccentric West Virginia Sen. Robert Byrd in being one of only two Democrats voting to confirm the first judicial nominee out of the box, Texas Judge Pricilla Owens. And in doing so, she has upset a large number of Louisiana and National Democrats. As one Louisiana Demo observed: "You've got to play on one side of the fence or the other. You can't steer in between. The only things in the middle of the road are yellow lines and dead skunks."

Don't expect much harmony for these two. Vitter plays rough, but Proud Mary has shown she can stand toe to toe with him or any one else. Don't forget, she was involved in open warfare with the Prez, the VP and numerous other major GOP big wigs in her hard fought re-election effort. She has shown she can handle opposition for the other side. So far, the Lady has proven to be a survivor. Her danger is opposition from within, and she apparently will continue to walk that tight rope. But it's quite a drop if she falls off.

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"Just tell yourself, Duckie, you're really quite lucky!"  
[Dr. Seuss quotes](#)

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown