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Baton Rouge, Louisiana



REPERCUSSIONS OF WASHINGTON PROBLEMS BACK IN LOUISIANA

Remember GE's Jack Welch who wrote a book last year about the four stages of crisis management? Republican leaders in Congress need to do some real soul-searching and move beyond the quagmire outlined by Welch. First comes "denial" followed by "containment." We have seen plenty of that from the GOP over the past 12 days. We are all sideline observers in the third stage taking place right now, "blame shifting." The fourth stage is the hardest. Blood on the floor, which means congressional leadership heads must roll. If not, you're going to see some electoral ax wielding by voters in less than four weeks.

What's most interesting is the strongest critics of how the Republican leadership has handled the Foley crisis has not come so much from Democrats. It has come more from the conservative right. And these are the people who are needed for Republicans to win nationwide. If these normally "knee-jerk" GOP voters stay at home, or if they decide to punish a Republican congressman in one of about 54 "at risk" districts, then Democrats have more than a reasonable chance of taking over control.

There has always been a whole different mindset outside the Beltway in Washington. A large number of middle-of-the-road voters wanted and expected more than what they perceived to be being offered by Republicans. They wanted family a values-based party, a reform party, a party that would control spending and that would take reasonable steps to deal with the mass immigration that is taking place in this country today. But the dispiriting thing for the grassroots of conservative Republicanism is that they now see their own party as no morally different from those in power they replaced a decade ago.

If you go back and review American history some 150 years ago, you learn that the Republican Party was originally forged by an alliance between the existing wing party, a mix of the established people with property similar to a large part of the Republican Party

today, and the abolitionists, who were intensely fueled by almost Messianic purposes. And isn't the Republican Party today quite similar to what was established a century and a half ago? You have the regular established Republicans who inherited their part in many cases, and the newly emerging religious evangelicals on the right.

The question is, can the current Republican establishment hold? Maybe not a divorce between these two segments. But a possible separation. A good number of grassroots conservative Republicans may well see their own present leadership as no different morally from the Democratic group they replaced a decade ago. I doubt they will hold their nose and vote Democratic. But the present crisis probably slows and deters voter turn out, and the motivation for evangelicals to work within the grassroots maybe dampen enough to affect 25 or 30 key congressional races around the country.

About the only good news for Republicans is that there is one month left to go before Election Day. And a lot can happen in the next 27 days. But as the Jack Welch message makes clear, not a lot can happen until Republicans in Congress do something more about their leadership.

So if the scenario plays out where Democrats take over control of the House representatives in Congress, how does Louisiana fare in the mix? First of all, the name of the game is "seniority." In its glory days, the Bayou State always did well via longevity. Even just a few years ago, Congressman Billy Tauzin, Senator John Breaux, and Bob Livingston all gave Louisiana lots of clout in Washington.

Livingston went from chairman of the Appropriations Committee to the top dog as Speaker of the House. His demise was catastrophic for Louisiana. Can you imagine the financial help New Orleans would have received post Katrina if Livingston were still Speaker?

There's not a lot of seniority to crow about in the Louisiana delegation today. Both Senators Landrieu and Vitter are relatively speaking new kids on the block. The same goes for the current make up of Louisiana House members with the exception of Shreveport's Jim McCrery and Richard Baker from Baton Rouge. If Republicans hold the House, McCrery's 20 years of hanging there probably gives him a nod to head up the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. Richard Baker could well be in line for the chairmanship of the House Financial Services Committee, which oversees the banking and insurance industries.

Rep. Bobby Jindal and Charles Boustany are new on the national stage, and the switch won't make much difference in their clout. The same goes for 5th District Congressman Rodney Alexander, who is in his second term. He may have wished that he had never switched parties two years ago. And Jindal is laying plans to move the Baton Rouge next year anyway.

The only major Republican -- Democratic fight going on in Louisiana now is the third District donnybrook between first year incumbent Charlie Melancon and the challenger

(for the second time around) State Senator Craig Romero. Melancon is presently leading this race, and has a chance to gain a seat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee if he is re-elected. This committee has jurisdiction over the oil and gas industry, and a spot here for Melancon could be a real coup for the state.

When all is said and done, Republican problems in Washington should not have more than a minor ripple effect in a few contested Louisiana congressional elections. But you could make a sure bet that if Louisiana Democratic Party leaders had known six months ago about the problems and scandals yet to develop within the Republican Party, there would have been a number of highly contested congressional races taking place right now.

I've learned from personal experience that, as Yogi Berra often said: "It ain't over till it's over." There is a very reliable "wave theory" in politics. And whoever is catching the wave as Election Day approaches usually is the winner. Democrats are close to grabbing the way right now. But remember that it's like dog years.. One human year is like seven dog years. The next 27 days will really feel like for five months. Whatever the prognosticators are now saying, there is still a long way to go.

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We'd all like to vote for the best man but he's never a candidate."
Kin Hubbard.

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

Jim Brown's weekly column appears 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>.

Also, tune in Jim's radio show 1380 am in Baton Rouge. It is streamed live on the worldwide web at www.talk1380.com from 9:00 until 11:00 am, weekdays.

