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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### LOUISIANA POLITICAL DREAM TEAM IN THE MAKING?

Key business leaders, primarily in the greater New Orleans area, have been over the past two weeks seriously pushing the idea of what some are billing as a “Louisiana political dream team” for two of the top political posts in the state. Many of those talking about alternatives to present key officials in office are associated with the New Orleans Business Council, a loose group of men and women who for several years have pushed for major reform in the greater New Orleans area. Their present choices? Former U.S. Senator John Breaux for governor and present Lieutenant-Governor Mitch Landrieu for Mayor of New Orleans.

First, the New Orleans mayor’s race. A number of the city’s business leaders have been grumbling for weeks about present Mayor Ray Nagin’s lack of availability. Calls and emails have gone unanswered. According to sources in the Business Council, the Mayor rarely meets with the committees he’s appointed, or for that matter, even his own staff.

But the straw that really broke the camel’s back came over Thanksgiving. The New Orleans news media reported volunteers from throughout the country came to New Orleans to serve Thanksgiving meals and to lend a hand over the holidays. As the *Times-Picayune* wrote, “All around New Orleans, hundreds of strangers from other states have given up a holiday week to help New Orleans in a continuing relief effort that’s been going on since September.” Many feel the holidays are a symbolic time when public officials and other civic leaders need to maintain a high-profile presence showing that the city is appreciative and on the way back. Where was the Mayor? He was spending the week in Jamaica at a private villa. (See the full story under “Relevant Articles” on the front page of my website – “New Orleans looking to strengthen relations with Jamaica”) “If ever there was a time where his presence was needed as a real symbol, this was it,” said a local business source. “When we needed him, he was off on a vacation.”

So is Mitch Landrieu interested? Yes, say key advisors to the Lieutenant-Governor. Those around him see present Governor Kathleen Blanco in serious political trouble. If she is not re-elected and Landrieu is, he could well be waiting around another eight years before a viable opportunity arises for him to run for the state’s top office. In the meantime, he can wait around playing second fiddle to Blanco in a job that many admit has little real clout, or he could take on what well is shaping up to be the toughest job in America.

Even his critics agree that Landrieu is articulate, hardworking and, with a direct connection to Louisiana’s senior U.S. Senator, has an open door for solid connections throughout the country. Many who know him well feel he would be a natural to criss-cross the country telling New Orleans’ story, and building up badly needed support after some disastrous P.R. moves by many officials of the state following the storm.

Landrieu is keeping his decision close to his chest. He is telling those who inquire that he has set December 15<sup>th</sup> as the date to make a decision.

One factor is just when any New Orleans city election will take place? Local and state elections officials seem to be crawfishing on whether they can get ready for a February 4<sup>th</sup> first primary. Mardi Gras will go on exactly as scheduled but the election may be postponed. As political pundit and raconteur C.B. Forgotson wrote in one of his recent biting commentaries: “Perhaps the Governor should call another special session to pass legislation to turn the elections over to the Carnival Krewes. It seems they are more capable than our state and local elected officials.”

In the recently completed special session of the Legislature, a statewide election date was authorized on April 29th. If the city elections in New Orleans are moved, this would be a backup to the early February election. It gives Landrieu a little more time to make up his mind.

A little more time no doubt plays in Landrieu’s favor. We will know in two weeks, and the fact remains that he’s getting a lot of calls from Republicans and Democrats alike.

So how about John Breaux for Governor? The buzz started out of the New Orleans business community several weeks ago, and has been batted around in Louisiana congressional offices all this week. The question of course is why Breaux, who had spent some 30 years in political life, would give up a highly successful and lucrative lobbying career to come back into the Louisiana political fray?

Friends close to the former Senator say that he has not ruled out the possibility of running. “He’s spending as much or more time away from home than he ever did in public office,” said one good friend. “Yes, he’s making a lot more money, but John Breaux just likes being in public life. He likes being a part of the political scene, and relishes the challenge of straightening out a heck of a mess down in Baton Rouge.”

Key members of two groups are presently pushing a Breaux candidacy. Members of the New Orleans Business Council and other business leaders feel Breaux is the best person positioned to help with the recovery effort in New Orleans. “Heck, he’s on a first-name basis with everyone from the President on down,” said one New Orleanean. “He’s got enough sense to put one plan together, ask for a reasonable sum of money, and get something done.”

Key Democrats also are quietly pushing Breaux as an alternative. With Blanco on the ropes and Congressman Bobby Jindal licking his chops for a rematch, the feeling seems to be, at least for now, that Blanco is in real trouble. Breaux is looked upon as the one Democrat who can beat anyone in the field. They point out that the former Senator, even today, remains probably the most popular political figure in the state.

The Governor’s race is a little less than two years away, so Breaux can afford to sit back and assess his options through next year. Fundraising would be a minor concern.

Nobody knows how to raise money better than John Breaux.

So, will there be a dream team? The odds makers say Landrieu is becoming more and more interested as each week goes by. Breaux is still a long shot as far as making a decision to be a candidate. But stranger things have happened, and there's a lot of prominent Louisianans strongly urging him to move in this direction.

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And how about the Secretary of State's race, scheduled for next fall at the same time as the Louisiana Congressional elections? Incumbent Al Ater, who took over following the untimely death of elected SOS Fox McKeithen, announced this week that he will not be a candidate. But you can bet there will be no shortage of other candidates.

At the top of the list, if she decides to run, is Fox's daughter, Marjorie McKeithen. Her grandfather was a popular Governor in the 60s, and she has maintained close connections with McKeithen supporters for years. She is a Baton Rouge lawyer, maintains a home in New Orleans as well as the family homestead in Columbia, and would be considered a strong candidate.

But she will find a crowded field, at least from the names being battered around. Remember that the election is only ten months away. So fundraising will be a big part of any decision for any potential candidate who is considering the race.

Other names in the mix include Sen. Jay Dardenne (R. Baton Rouge), Sen. James David Cain (R. Dry Creek). Suzy Terrell (former Commissioner of Elections, R. New Orleans), Peggy Wilson (former New Orleans City Councilwoman, R.), Sen. Francis Heitmeier, (D. New Orleans), Norby Chabert (brother of former Sen. Marty Chabert, D. Houma), Sen. Diana Bajoie (D. New Orleans), the list goes on and other names will emerge in the weeks to come.

Needless to say, the election next fall will be a bell weather of what voters are still around and what those running in 2007 can expect. Stay tuned.

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***"Mothers all want their sons to grow up to be president but they don't want them to become politicians in the process."***

***-- John Fitzgerald Kennedy***

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown