

Thursday, April 15, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

COOKSEY HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT 5TH DISTRICT RACE

Northeast Louisiana is gearing up for a barnburner of a congressional race this fall matching up incumbent Congressman Rodney Alexander (Democrat) against popular former congressman Dr. John Cooksey. Alexander's short flirtation with the Republican Party, so prevailing wisdom goes, leaves him a little more venerable and opens up the door for Cooksey to have growing room in this conservative northeast Louisiana district. The National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee has made the Fifth a "must" win, and has pegged Alexander as vulnerable.

But the Doc is now having second thoughts. He enjoys his medical practice; the service he gives to patients all over north Louisiana and the high income that comes with the job. And he has been quietly expressing concerns to close friends that he feels the President is in serious political trouble. According to those close to the former Congressman, he is letting it be known he does not want to serve under a Democratic President, and also face the possibility of having to be part of a Congress with the Democrats in control. Cooksey feels that this is a good possibility with the deteriorating situation in Iraq and continuing economic problems at home.

These "second thoughts" on the part of Cooksey are the reason that state Senator Robert Barham is once again looking at the race. He ran a close fourth two years ago, and has been in contact with the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee to see if he can garner Washington support.

Any candidate funded by the RNC will be of major concern to incumbent Alexander. But he will breathe a huge sigh of relief if Cooksey passes on this race.

NEW AIRLINE BAD DEAL FOR BATON ROUGE

It initially sounded like good news. A new airline operating out of Baton Rouge. And of course the always touted reason that new jobs would be created locally when the new business starts up.

Not so with Allegiant Airlines. Baton Rouge promised the airline \$430,000.00 in taxpayer subsidies to fly four days a week to Las Vegas. It's hard to imagine many Las Vegas residents wanting to come in masse to Baton Rouge. More out migration and more local money being spent in another state. And what about the new jobs? There

weren't any. Instead of hiring ticket agents, baggage handlers, and other airport help, Allegiant had signed a contract with Delta Airlines to handle all of the local work.

The state has learned a hard lesson in recent months. It doesn't make sense to go out and buy new jobs with public money. It's either a losing proposition or it doesn't work. (See the Football Network and State Farm). Alabama went out and bought a Mercedes plant that created several thousand new jobs. And taxpayers there will pay millions for more than fifty years to come. The state would have come out better financially if it would have written a check for \$100,000.00 to every new employee that was hired. The cost to the Alabama treasury will be much more than this in the years to come. Despite all of the hoopla when the new business comes in, over the life of the plant, it just doesn't make sense to subsidize these projects. Baton Rouge is lucky. The airline's decision to bail out saved the city almost a half of a million dollars. Now what about that pothole in front of my house?

There was extensive news coverage last week about a study by two political scientists from Hamilton College in upstate New York of voting patterns in Louisiana's last governor's race. Their conclusions were stark and simple. Rural white North Louisiana voters turned their backs on Bobby Jindal because of race. His Indian ancestry just didn't set well with these red necks. Bubbas for Bobby was a public relations figment that got no traction.

The conclusions reached in the study are much too simplistic. I wrote about this theory in a politicsla.com November 20th column last year. To many of these north Louisiana voters, it wasn't so much a racial factor with Jindal; they just weren't comfortable with him. He talked too fast and he always wore a suit with the same red tie. He never took off his coat. And can you believe he admitted he didn't hunt or fish?

Media gurus Val Marmillion and Rannah Gray produced some of the cleverest spots of the gubernatorial campaign for Blanco that were only shown in two of the state's media markets. They pictured Mike Foster in a duck blind giving advice to Bobby Jindal. Foster was decked out in full camouflage. Jindal had on his normal dark suit and red tie. The ads made fun of Jindal's inability to "connect" with those rural voters who had given Foster overwhelming support when he first ran in 1995. So it was much more complicated than race.

And the study gave no acknowledgement to the Blanco "comfort factor." These same rural north Louisiana voters may not have been wildly enthusiastic about Blanco. But they were comfortable with her. She wasn't threatening, she smiled a lot, and hey, she had a hunting license. There were big differences that went way beyond race.

The study is called "*Black, White, Brown and Cajun: The Racial Dynamics of the 2003 Louisiana Gubernatorial Election*". The conclusions are definitely not accurate. But isn't it amazing that a couple of obscure professors in upstate New York spent all of that time looking at what's going on in Louisiana? At least we continue to be interesting down here.

SCALIA RUNS FOR COVER

The Supreme Court's most arrogant member came all the way to Mississippi last week to set a horrible example for public officials in every level of government.

Justice Antonin Scalia spoke in Hattiesburg on the sanctity of the U. S. Constitution, while U. S. Marshals, acting on his behalf, trampled on freedoms guaranteed in the first and fourth amendments of the very document he was discussing. There is a federal law (the Privacy Protection Act) that specifically prohibits government officials from seizing journalists' materials. But that didn't bother the marshal being directed by Scalia. Tape recordings by several reporters were seized and destroyed on the spot. Scalia apparently has a standing policy to prohibit any recording of his speeches, and as a member of the Supreme Court, he is free to do pretty much as he pleases. But he shouldn't be allowed to defy constitutional and congressional prohibitions against the seizure of property without due process.

Two point to ponder.

First, it is troubling that the Justice has such a hostile attitude towards an open society. And second, maybe it's time he goes back to work. I wrote about his "highly publicized" duck hunting trip to Louisiana in January. I also wrote about his speech on judicial ethics (an oxymoron?) he gave in New Orleans a few weeks ago. The Supreme Court as a whole has slacked off dramatically in the case loads it considers. Every year, the number of cases accepted by the Supreme Court drops, where less than 1% of the appeals filed annually are granted reviews. Several years ago, some 200 cases were considered. This year, less than seventy will probably be argued in the hallowed chamber.

Major constitutional issues are facing the court, and you can't get the job done in a Louisiana duck blind. Go back to work Justice Scalia.

"The penalty for laughing in a courtroom is six months in jail; if it were not for this penalty, the jury would never hear the evidence."

--H. L. Mencken

“Justice is incidental to law and order.

--J. Edgar Hoover

Peace and Justice to you and your family.

Jim Brown