

Thursday, April 22, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

IS CHRIS JOHN HEDGING HIS BET IN THE U. S. SENATE RACE?

Every candidate running for Louisiana's open U. S. Senate race has filed a form with the Federal Elections Commission stating clearly that each is raising money for the purpose of running for United States Senator. That is, every candidate but one. Although, he has announced for the job of Senator, Seventh District Congressman Chris John so far continues to raise money that goes into his congressional campaign account. So the question is being asked "Is John hedging his bet?"

Under rules of the Federal Elections Commission, John can legally raise money through his congressional account, and at some point in the future transfer it over to a U. S. Senate campaign account. So he is legally within the rules in how he is presently raising money. But his failure to make it "official" and be on record for the statewide office has several of the new candidates for John's Seventh Congressional District seat a little uneasy.

John announced for the open U. S. Senate seat the minute incumbent Senator John Breaux made the decision to retire. And he quickly garnered support from key members in the Washington Democratic party establishment, as well as money PACs out of the Capitol. He was hoping to make it a head up two-candidate race. Republican candidate David Vitter initially seemed to be the only Republican running, and John hoped to be the sole consensus Democrat. Both of these candidates' expectations were unrealistic. A U. S. Senate seat just doesn't come along all that often. Breaux held his seat for 18 years, and could have stayed for as long as he wanted. Mary Landrieu won a hard fought victory two years ago, and will be in Washington for the foreseeable future. So the odds are the next senator will hold the office for a long time to come.

Although behind in the money race, State Treasurer John Kennedy continues to mount an impressive campaign. He was unopposed for re-election to his present post last year, and has the luxury of traveling the state doing his job and (perhaps) doing a little campaigning and fundraising on the side. State Rep. Arthur Morrell is letting it be known that he is serious and can not be talked out of the race. Former Governor Buddy Roemer has picked up his pace with phone calls being made throughout the state. A business group in Baton Rouge is even talking to Sixth District Congressman Richard Baker about the race. As was the case in last year's governor's race, less than 20% of the vote might get you in the runoff.

It's a long way until election day. And John is popular enough in his district that he can shut all of the other congressional candidates down if he changes his mind by mid-summer. Money will play a role in his final decision. So far, he is significantly ahead of John Kennedy and a little behind David Vitter in raising dollars. The winner will spend more than 5 million dollars, with two-thirds of the money coming from outside

Louisiana. That's why you will be seeing all of these major candidates criss-crossing the country in the months to come.

A lot of people in Louisiana would support the candidate who would agree to only fund his campaign with Louisiana dollars. Unfortunately, that's not going to happen. So all Chris John and all of the rest of the candidates can do is raise the bucks, then make their final decision just before qualification opens in August.

What's going to be the major issue in the U. S. Senate race? National Security? Saving our Wetlands? The lack of Louisiana's fair share of federal highway funds? Economic Development with reform of our tax policy? Well.....not quiet. The big issue so far seems to be ... cockfighting! That's right. One of the first big areas of disagreement among the candidates is the continuing legality of one of south Louisiana's top sporting events.

If you spend any time in south Louisiana, you know that in many small communities there, cockfighting is almost a way of life. If you think there is intensity at an LSU football game, you ought to go to the cockfighting arena in Sunset (St. Landry Parish). There is a permanent arena as big as a high school gym, and the money flows in fight after fight throughout the evening. Bullfighting and boxing matches are lightweight compared to the enthusiasm in Sunset on a Friday night.

So it's time to draw the lines in the dirt. Who's for it and who's against it?

Well, there's John Kennedy, the white knight reformer who wants to bring south Louisiana's favorite sport to an end. "I'll do anything in my power once elected to the U. S. Senate to put an end to cockfighting in the United States," he stated recently.

On the other side of the isle, Chris John is leading the charge to keep cockfighting legal. He strongly defends the sport as a "social and cultural event," a "family type of business," and a multimillion dollar industry. Hey, it's economic development. And John has some pretty good backers. John Breaux and Billy Tauzin have fought every effort to oppose cockfighting for years. Senator Mary Landrieu says it's a "states' rights issue." Arthur Morrell voted against cockfighting in the legislature. And David Vitter is keeping a very low profile on this one. So look for the feathers to fly in future debates. It's hard to believe it, but if the election is close, a stance on cockfighting could tip the scales in favor of the winner.

GOOD WEEKEND FOR SPORTS GROUPIES

A great weekend for LSU sports nuts and I was one of the die hards. I put on my widest brim hat (for sun protection), filled a shoulder strap cooler (filled up with water and Gatorade), filled another bag with magazines and newspapers, loaded on the sun screen, and headed to the LSU Sports Complex. First stop was the football stadium on Saturday for a jambalaya lunch with a small group of hard core supporters and to view the 1:00 p.m. scrimmage. Nick Saban was all over the field, shouting out criticism and offering encouragement, and coordinating the most “hands on” orchestrating anyone can imagine. I could picture Bear Bryant dispassionally sitting up in the coach’s box, quietly observing what was going on. This was a stark comparison to the dominating presence of Saban. Each player on the field knew the coach’s eyes were on their every move.

The focus from all the onlookers was, of course, the quarterback. Who is the most qualified successor to Matt Mauck? Senior Marcus Randall has the job initially. But he was inconsistent during the scrimmage, as he was two years ago when he replaced Mauck for half of the season. The die hards who are incessant in their interest seem to be betting on red shirt freshman Matt Flynn (from Houston) to be next in line. He plays consistent and predictable; some call him a clone of Matt Mauck.

But I’m putting my money on the big guy. He’s 6 foot 5 and weighs 240 pounds. JaMarcus Russell throws the ball 70 yards off of his front foot, and has a side arm bullet that gives you the feeling he’s throwing a fast ball. Some athletes just seem to “flow” well and Russell has a kind of natural rhythm that makes you think that he is destined for big things.

It’s just my hunch, and many feel otherwise. But as the fall season develops, my prediction is that Russell will rise to the top of the heap.

I passed on the LSU baseball game. The Tigers were way ahead of Georgia when I left Tiger stadium, so I opted to spend several hours at the Tiger Invitational track meet. A track scholarship put me through college, and Pat Henry’s Tigers are the best team in the nation. Track hands down is the most relaxing sport for the spectator. I found a seat in the shade, and had plenty of liquid to keep me hydrated. Track meets move slow, with about 10 minutes between events. Plenty of time for my stack of reading materials.

But the highlight of my sports weekend was Sunday’s SEC women’s golf tournament. I drove out to the University Club, south of the LSU campus, to make use of the driving range and to work on my putting. A real battle for individual honors was taking place between Tennessee’s Violeta Retamoza and Vanderbilt’s May Wood. To stretch my legs, I followed along for the final few holes, including a necessary sudden death playoff between the two leaders.

May Wood is a superstar in the making. She stands 6 foot 2, is extremely coordinated, an attractive blonde who hits the ball like Tiger Woods. Her final drive went 285 yards, and she knocked in an 8 foot putt for the victory. She is the most impressive college golfer I’ve ever seen, and golf fans will be hearing a lot more from her in the years to come.

As for me on the golf course? Well, let's just say no one gets real concerned when I step up to tee off. I'll be considered a "duffer" for the rest of my golfing career.

(If you really want complete, detailed coverage on a day-to-day basis of all LSU sports, go to www.dandydon.com)

THREE CHEERS FOR STATE DISTRICT JUDGE MARTHA SASSONE

In Jefferson Parish, Judge Sassone threw out the conviction of Master P's brother, because prosecutors had withheld key information about the witnesses that were called to implicate him.

Why prosecutors in a democratic society continue to hide evidence that would lead to a fair decision is one of the continuing troubling aspects of our judicial system.

An opinion column in the Times Picayune summed it up well:

"Anyone involved in the Louisiana criminal justice system is painfully aware of our embarrassing history of chronic prosecutorial misconduct. The failure to disclose exculpatory and favorable evidence to a defendant – which is what happened in this case – is just that. Our prosecutors' repeated uses of trickery and deceit to obtain convictions have been singled out and condemned by the U. S. Supreme Court."

Punish the guilty, but put all of evidence on the table for the jury to decide. It took a courageous judge to see that justice prevailed, and that the cover up by these prosecutors was not allowed to stand.

For a first rate series of editorials on how justice has run amuck in Louisiana, click on <http://www.crowleypostsignal.com/editorials.html>. Milo Nickel, who writes for the Moody newspaper chain (some 40 papers throughout Louisiana), has done a great job of summarizing many of the abuses that take place within the federal judicial system in Louisiana.

"The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground."

--Thomas Jefferson

“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

--Abraham Lincoln

Peace and Justice to you and your family.

Jim Brown