

Thursday, September 23rd, 2004
Gulf Shores, Alabama

AUBURN STICKS IT TO LSU AND BETRAYS THOUSANDS OF ALABAMIANS

It was only a football game. A football game for goodness sake. Yet while thousands of Alabama citizens were left homeless, without shelter and at the mercy of vandals following Hurricane Ivan, the Alabama state police were ordered out of the disaster area and north to Auburn. To direct traffic for a football game. And it gets worse.

Thousands of Louisiana fans were misled by Auburn officials about travel conditions. Assurances were given that traffic would flow normally and gas and other supplies would be made available. That wasn't the case. There were virtually no gas stations open from Mobile to Montgomery. The few that were often had lines that created a two to three hour wait. Traffic often moved at a snail's pace.

And to top off all the bad news, LSU loses the game on a really bad call in the final seconds. It was not a good weekend.

I drove through Mobile going and coming back from Pensacola, where I was delivering supplies (food, water, ice, a generator, charcoal, a grill, etc.) to family members in need. On local Mobile radio, caller after caller were expressing their outrage over the Auburn-LSU game being played. "We're desperate down here. People have no place open to buy food, no running water, no electricity and, in many cases, no place to sleep. It's a dangerous situation. Yet we have many state people who could help all up watching a **FOOTBALL GAME.**" That was the message heard over and over.. Even though their home school won, there was an overwhelming consensus that playing the game was not the right thing to do.

I don't know if LSU officials protested or not. I hope so. LSU Fans got the short end of the stick. And the local Tigers, with their early season problems, could have used the extra time to prepare for future games.

Back to the disaster. The damage cannot be adequately portrayed in pictures and on television. I passed numerous people standing by destroyed apartments and houses. You had to drive (if you had a car and many did not) an hour and a half to find gas. Then you waited in line up to four hours. Electricity was out for 50 miles or more around Pensacola. It was a four hour trip around Pensacola Bay since the bridges had sections missing.

Locals didn't know where to look for help. Public service notices said FEMA would be there to assist. In my several days there, I saw one FEMA car, parked in front of a donut shop. No other signs of your friendly federal government around.

The suffering will go on for a good while. It will take years to rebuild. A week has gone by and thousands still suffer terribly.

But, hey! The football game went off on schedule.
Like clockwork. Are these great decision makers or what?

BATON ROUGE MAYOR'S RACE

Sen. Kip Holden wasn't supposed to get this far. In fact, there were some who took bets that he wouldn't even qualify this past August. But Saturday night, the four term state legislator led the field to be the next Mayor of Baton Rouge.

Can he win in the Nov. 2nd runoff? Yes. But he still has a big hill to climb. Incumbent Mayor Bobby Simpson is no pushover, even though he garnered only 34% of the vote in the first primary.

Rep. William Daniel ran a close third, and Simpson has a solid shot at attracting many of Daniel's supporters. That's because the race was really not one of "any body but Bobby," although some Simpson opponents tried to paint it this way. Simpson is a rather likeable fellow, and not that many people genuinely hate him the way that some feel about the two presidential candidates. It's obvious there are many voters who feel there are too many unsolved problems facing the city. A lack of vision? Not enough long range planning? Major road problems? There are numerous issues that need more attention. But few strongly dislike Simpson.

That's where the race factor comes in. There are many undecided white voters, mostly all coming from the Daniel camp, who could look favorably on Holden's candidacy and support him. He's bright, articulate, seems in command of key issues that have not been addressed by the present administration. But there is a fear within this circle of middle class, white undecideds that those who will run the day-in, day-out operations of the city will become overwhelmingly African-American.

Holden would be a one-termer if he took that approach. But fair or not, that's the knock he has to overcome.

I was on a local construction site this week with a contractor, a commercial plumber and a sale rep. When I inquired as to whether they could vote for Holden, they became defensive. "What if the circumstances were reversed? Do you think black voters would support a white candidate over a black candidate, and not worry that a number of whites would be brought in to city hall? We just don't know if Kip will have a balanced group of qualified blacks and whites running the city."

Look for Holden to announce a number of high profile business leaders who support his candidacy in the near future to overcome this concern. And don't been surprised to see Democratic statewide officials jump in with support. Since Baton Rouge is the capitol city, there is much more interest than what would normally be engendered by a city this size. And a strong Democratic mayor from this area can be factor in future statewide races.

So who has the best shot of wining? Both candidates have the opportunity. Holden will overcome any concerns about the race issue with a large number of community activists openly supporting him. And Simpson knows well that he has to mend some fences and reach out to many who opposed him in the first primary.

No candidate in the first primary really offered a vision for the city over the coming decades. Baton Rouge will surpass New Orleans in population by the year 2025, and will have the chance to claim the title as the queen city of the Deep South. That is, with a Mayor who looks beyond the nuts and bolts of daily governing. A good city manager can worry about garbage pick-up and pot holes.

Baton Rouge needs a visionary mayor who portrays this future city as a cultural, economic and educational center of the south. A Mayor who will reach out to LSU and Southern for help in restructuring public policy. A Mayor who will appoint an economic advisory council to assist in setting public priorities for economic development. A Mayor who will use his office as a "bully pulpit" to push for business partnerships that will adopt various schools throughout the parish. The Mayor himself should commit to be in a classroom for a "Mayor's talk" once a week in a different parish school, as a sign to the public that educational improvement is a top priority.

The message is simple. We are going to dramatically improve our quality of life here in Baton Rouge. We're going to bring more young people into government, and open up membership on various boards and commissions so that a broad range of citizen participation takes place. We're going to make Baton Rouge, in the coming years, the envy of cities throughout the south.

So next Mayor of Baton Rouge, here's your message:

"My role as the next Mayor is to define and articulate the direction this city should take in the years to come. I want us to join together and have the vision to develop a long-range plan with innovative ideas for our future.

"'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' So goes the ancient admonition from Proverbs 29:18. We can't let the time pass us by, while vibrant cities in neighboring states are making tremendous strides. New ideas are coming from cities our size all over the country, and they should be emanating from Baton Rouge."

"The British philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, tells us, 'The vitality of thought is in adventure. Ideas won't keep. Something must be done about them.'"

“I think we are on the verge of doing something special about our city. You can sense it in the deep concern by young and old alike in our community. There is a strong call to improve the quality of life in Baton Rouge today. As your Mayor, I am ready to heed this call.”

So that’s my opinion. That’s the message in a nutshell.

But then, again, I may be wrong.

“A computer lets you make mistakes faster than any other invention in human history, with the possible exception of handguns and tequila.”

Mitch Radcliffe

“My formula for success is to rise early, work late, and strike oil.”

J. Paul Getty

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown