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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **TIME FOR POLITICAL TRASH TALKIN'**

So come on now, Brown. Enough is enough. We've had our fill of your esoteric similes on political persuasions half way around the world. Remember, any one who is mellow enough to read this site or this column week after week is nothing more than a Louisiana political junkie. We want the straight poop. We need the nitty gritty. Give us rumors, innuendo, the behind-the-scenes rumblings. Tell us what's going on. We need our daily political fix.

Well, O.K. You win. I'll roll up my sleeves and get down in the dirt of the grassroots. Let's start with the Louisiana Republicans. A growing, well organized force united with one voice in opposing the Democrats in general on any new taxes, and setting up land mines for both the Governor and Sen. Landrieu? One well oiled group? Right? Hardly!

Far from speaking with one voice, the Cajun-Redneck GOP finds itself split up into three factions. The question is, will the three factions eventually come together, or will petty squabbling cause enough divisiveness to allow the Democrats to maintain a strong majority of statewide offices and solid control of the Louisiana legislature?

New Orleans flower mogul Roger Villere is the present chairman of the state party, and seems to have done a yeoman's job of keeping peace within the various factions of parish and local Republican faithful. He recently solidified his position in a standoff with US Sen. David Vitter over a new state party executive director. Vitter was pushing for the appointment of John Deiz from Gonzales, but Villere won out with the selection of Ellen Wray, who formerly served as political director with Go Pac headed up by former Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts. Wray, by all accounts, is off to a good start which has helped Villere solidify his control of the party apparatus.

There is an uneasy alliance between Villere and the state's Republican Senator. Vitter feels he is "the Man" among state Republicans, and wants the state apparatus to basically be "his" organization. Can't blame him. The Guv is doing the same thing within Democratic ranks. And Vitter has begun his own PAC much to the chagrin of Villere and Co. The Senator, as least for now, wants firm control over the finances that will support state Republicans in 2007.

"Money equates to political power," says one close Republican observer. "You've got to understand where Vitter is coming from. He flat out wants to be President. That's no joke. He's making extensive plans as we speak. Having a stronghold on the state party apparatus is an important component of his effort to be President."

Vitter is not alone in being from Louisiana and having higher ambitions. Congressman Bobby Jindal shares Vitter's resolve for higher office. His timeframe, according to friends who stay in close touch, is to initially focus on the Governor's race, possibly in 2007, and more likely four years later. Some advisors are suggesting working towards a major House leadership position in the coming few years with an eye on the Speaker's job. But others around Jindal say he's too ambitious. "Look, he was almost Governor and he's being touted all over Washington. Jindal's not about to wait around for 20 years for a more meaningful job," another source observed.

The problem is that both the Senator and the Congressman may feel the Governor's job could be the next best step up the ladder. Jindal's fundraising team, headed up by John Ringo out of a Metairie office a floor down from the Congressional office, lets contributors know that a number of options are open for Jindal, though campaign dollars are now being raised for a re-election effort. But Jindal is closely monitoring the Governor's approval ratings, and will be doing his own polling statewide after the coming legislative session. Says one Jindal operative: "If the Governor stumbles with issues like teacher's pay raises and the Saints, Jindal's interest will pick up considerably. If not, I look for him to be the leading candidate in six years.

Why Governor? Because Congressmen as well as U.S. Senators have a poor track record of moving to higher office. Governors do much better on the national scene. And not by just being part of a national ticket. Look at the number of ex-Governors who have ended up in the President's cabinet. Which brings up Vitter's future.

Don't be surprised to learn that a future run for Governor is not out of the question. Remember, Vitter almost ran last time, till he butted heads with then Gov. Mike Foster. And Vitter sees the same logic outlined above from the Jindal camp. If you want to be President, being Governor is the best stepping stone.

So does this put Vitter and Jindal on a collision course? Maybe. Talk about one heck of a chess match. The brash senator and the new kid on the block, both from the same arena in Jefferson Parish, knocking heads for the state's top job with an eye towards the White House.

According to friends who closely observe them both, they each have different styles. Says one: "Bobby enjoys politics more. He likes to talk with people. He's more personable. While David likes the power. He's a bottom line guy and wants results."

So who's the third faction within the LAGOP? It's the traditional gang. The remnants of the Treen faction of the party that have been financially involved at a major level for a number of years. Bollinger Shipyards President Boiesie Bollinger and New Orleans developer Joe Canizaro lead this pack. Add insurance company head Michael Gray. New Orleans banker Gary Solomon, a newcomer, also runs

(and spends) with this group although he maintains close individual relationships with both Vitter and Jindal.

The big bucks come from this third group, and have been directed, for the most part, towards the national scene. But Vitter has made a major move to re-direct how local contributions are spent. That's why he has talked both Ballinger and Canizaro into chairing his new political PAC. Score one for the Senator. Look for Jindal to have his own PAC up and running by mid-summer.

The next statewide elections in Louisiana are more than two years away. At this stage of the cycle in the past, few potential names, particularly Republicans, were being battered around. But because of controversy surrounding several statewide officials, the vultures are flexing and gearing up. A lot, of course, depends on possible shifting of chairs and spots that are either vacant or vulnerable. But here are a few of the names taking an early look

They're baaaaaack. Four former candidates, one who was a former statewide official. Suzie Terrell is on the prowl and closely monitoring the Secretary of State situation. Her old job, Elections Commissioner, was merged into this office and she is weighing a comeback.

Dan Kyle made the run-off for Insurance Commissioner, and is telling friends he is definitely interested in a statewide office again. The former Legislative Auditor received over 600,000 votes in his last statewide bid. Pat Brister, former chairman of the state Republican Party., also is taking a look at a statewide race, possible Secretary of State.

And former New Orleans City Councilwoman Peggy Wilson is looking to come out of retirement and look again at running for Insurance Commissioner or Secretary of State.(Peggy ran against me in 1991. Too bad she didn't win. Then I wouldn't have had all those problems).

In the Agriculture Commissioner's race, two Republican state senators, James David Cain and Craig Romero, are both monitoring the present Commissioner's standing. Romero just missed the run-off for 3<sup>rd</sup> District Congressman last fall. Cain, who is term limited for re-election, has been raising money and speaking statewide for the last year with an eye on the Ag job.

A number of other legislators, both Republican and Democrat, are also term limited and will be weighing their options. More on them in a future column. Party Chairman Roger Villere could not be more pleased. "You can mark it down. Republicans will be well financed and extremely competitive in all statewide as well as many legislative races in 2007."

We'll see, Mr. Chairman. But the scenario is becoming more interesting. So that's it, you political junkies. Oh, I'll get to the Democrats in time. And we will soon be hollering: "Let the Games begin."

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The Democrats are the party that says government will make you smarter, taller, richer, and remove the crabgrass on your lawn. The Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then they get elected and prove it.

*- P.J. O'Rourke*

A bureaucrat is a Democrat who holds some office that a Republican wants.

*- Alben W. Barkley*

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Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

(Be sure to go to Jim Brown's website to take today's poll and read Jim's daily Blog. Today's question? Who has the best chance of becoming President? David Vitter or Bobby Jindal? You can find it at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>. )

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