

Thursday, August 17th, 2006
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

THE SECRETARY OF STATE **WHAT'S HE SUPPOSED TO DO?**

Special statewide elections in Louisiana are only six weeks away. At the top of the ballot on September 30th will be an office second in line to the governorship. All the candidates are harping on the same theme. Each wants to be the business development voice of the state. Will the Governor let that happen? Fat chance.

The Secretary of State does have, under current law, some business duties. But the office serves primarily in that capacity as the filer and record keeper of corporations and partnerships. How can we gently say this....a glorified clerk of court. It would take a benevolent governor to turn over business development responsibility to another statewide official.

Governors in Louisiana and most other states are reluctant to give up any authority. Lt. Governors have been trying for years to have some designated responsibility, but have met with little success. Present Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu jokingly tells audiences that he checks each day to see if the Governor is healthy. If all is well, he is free to do whatever.

When I was Secretary of State in the 1980's, then Governor Edwin Edwards called me one day to ask if I would mind giving up my chairmanship of the Louisiana Tourist Commission, something traditionally under the purview of my office at the time. Then Lt. Governor Bobby Freeman was bored and looking for something to do. I obliged, and Freeman was happy to have a duty.

The Secretary of State's job does entail much more responsibility than the Lt. Governor. But business development is not one to crow about. Yet, as stated earlier, that's the focus of all the candidates presently running. So just what should these guys (no women qualified) be talking about? Elections. And there are some real problems to deal with. Here's the list.

Voting Rights Act-Congress, in its questionable wisdom, just passed a twenty five year extension of the 1965 law that continues to tag Louisiana as a second rate state. The law punishes a handful of primarily southern states for voting rights transgressions that took place over four decades ago. And it's an understatement to say the requirements are burdensome.

Any changes in procedures surrounding the voting process must be pre-approved by the Justice Department. And I mean any. Changes in precinct boundaries, polling locations, legislative districts, ballot formats, all have to be pre-approved. If a precinct location is moved one foot, permission has to be granted. Not so in most other states. But if the law is good for the goose, it should be good for the gander. It should apply to all states or none. And every candidate for Secretary of State should take a strong stand on this important issue.

Voting Machines. All over the country, concerns are being raised over new electronic voting machines. Many critics say these machines are riddled with security leaks, and are ripe for

computer hackers to change numbers without elections officials knowing anything about it. And what about backup? Many machines in use have no paper backup to verify correct totals. Yet so far, those who seek the office to oversee this process have been mute in discussing the implications of election fraud. Louisiana has been given \$50 million in federal funds to purchase new electronic voting machines. Checks and balances should certainly be an election debate subject.

Mandatory Voting? There are proposals being floated around to make voting mandatory, saying if jury service is required, why not voting? So we now may start blaming disinterested voters for the lack of political interest, and not the candidates who shy away for hot button issues. We do not need the modest loss of freedom by requiring mandatory voting. Election expressions are a privilege, not a chore. So fellows, tell up how you feel about forcing us to vote.

And how about the federal requirement in Louisiana that election ballots be printed in Spanish? I thought you had to pass a test in English to become an American citizen, which is a requirement to vote in the first place. When you go to France, you speak French. When you go to Japan, you speak Japanese. When you go to Mexico you speak Spanish. So why is it that English is optional in the USA? And in Louisiana, what about French, or Vietnamese for the large gathering of Asian Americans in New Orleans? Where do you stop?

So what's your take potential SOSs? Sure, you want to travel around the country stirring up business. But that's not the job. One of the main duties of being the state's chief elections officer is to deal with these controversy issues. Forget the political correctness. Speak up and tell us what you really believe. We all want to know.

People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war or before an **election**.
[Otto Von Bismarck](#)

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

Jim Brown's weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim's Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus read his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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