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Baton Rouge, Louisiana



### [IS IT OVER FOR LOUISIANA DEMOCRATS?](#)

Political prognosticators all over the state are jumping on the bandwagon writing obituaries for the state Democratic Party in Louisiana. A wipeout they say in the most recent statewide election. Two major offices were captured by the state GOP. Is this a sign of things to come in next year's gubernatorial election? Hardly.

Let's take a look at election results in the most recent September 30th contest. Yes, the Republicans gained two statewide offices, but there were some caveats here. First of all, turnout. 22% overall, with only a 19% turnout in the Insurance

Commissioners race. Newly elected Secretary of State Jay Dardenne ended up with 30% of the vote. But that's 30% of 22%. So Dardenne's mandate came from less than 7% of Louisiana's registered voters.

There was not much more of a victory total in the insurance race. Acting incumbent Jim Donelon pulled 50% of some 19% of those who actually voted in this race. Therefore his base of support finalized at a little over 9% of the registered voters. This means that over 90% of Louisiana's electorate failed to vote for either of these newly elected officials. This is a beginning, but a far cry from what will be needed again in less than a year when both offices are up for grabs once more.

It was no surprise that the normal democratic grassroots effort was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. When off gubernatorial elections take place, most of the Democratic officeholders on both the local and statewide level support Democratic statewide candidates. But traditionally, this means a nod, a good word, and a few votes on election day. There is only a small touch of the major election day effort the takes place when all these same Democratic officials are on the ballot themselves.

Traditionally, a sheriff and his deputies will vote for the Democrat in an off year election. But when the same official is also on the ballot, Democratic candidates get the benefit of a massive get out the vote effort. This applies to most of the courthouse crowd as well as police jurors, Democratic legislators, and a host of other candidates who work for months with a traditional constituency made up primarily of African-Americans, diehard Democrats, and organized labor. Anyone who thinks that 9% or even three times that amount will lead towards a statewide victory is certainly out of touch.

The state Democratic Party will become the Blanco financed party a year from now. In an all-out effort to benefit the governor, other Democratic statewide officials will reap the

windfall of a coordinated statewide effort. Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom is not only running for re-election, but expect him to take the helm of a major get out the vote undertaking. And as Odom has proven time and time again, he's the best in the business when it comes to political organization and strategy.

This certainly does not mean that present statewide officials can coast in the coming months. State Republican Chairman Roger Villere and his cohorts have said they will field major candidates for all statewide offices. They point to the recent loss by Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu in the New Orleans mayor's office, and the backlash against Attorney General Charlie Foti following the charges he made against several medical professionals following Katrina. But both are seasoned campaigners, good money raisers, and will benefit from a Democratic Party coordinated effort.

The state Republican Party has never been particularly successful in raising campaign funds for other candidates and putting together a well organized party effort. US Senator David Vitter is the key here. If Vitter makes a big push by lending his fund-raising skills and contacts in behalf of statewide candidates and key legislative seats, this could be an important factor in Republican victories next fall.

In the past, both parties in Louisiana have been little more than "support groups" for candidates on the ballot. For good reason, neither party has felt comfortable embracing platforms at the national level. Republicans in Washington are facing a major voter backlash, have done little to help Louisiana in its post Katrina recovery effort, and seem almost to be disintegrating with one scandal taking place after another. The national Democrats also have a perception problem Louisiana, with an image of being much too liberal for local tastes on a number of major issues. Speaker Pelosi doesn't have much of a ring to it at Phil's Oyster Bar in Baton Rouge.

What that means is that there is ample opportunity to concoct and fashion a Louisiana statewide recovery plan; a litany of proposals and promises to Louisiana voters that are unique to the Bayou State. Similar to the Republican efforts back in the mid-90s of making a "contract with America." How about a "Commitment to Louisiana?" A document that sets out some solid party principles that make sense to the average Louisianan.

Start by advocating a new constitution. It's obvious our present one needs major reworking. Most citizens are sick of constitutional amendments coming at them right and left. And how about federal formulas galore that work against Louisiana? Not just getting a percentage of offshore oil royalties, but in getting a fair shake on receiving federal highway funds, as well as more fairness in obtaining Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. Any objective review of what Louisiana receives will show Louisiana gets short changed. Neither party has shown any interest in rectifying these unfair allocations.

Ideas like a “Commitment to Louisiana” give a reason for a number of voters to be registered for a particular party the first place. Otherwise, parties in Louisiana will continue to be little more than special interest support groups.

There is a reason why independent registration is the fastest growing voter group in Louisiana. Right now, who cares what party is in office? Give them a reason to support candidates who come from a party with ideas and principals, and you may get a party in power at the top spot on down for a number of years to come.

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“The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people don't acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, instead.”

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

Jim Brown's weekly column appears 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>.

Also, tune in Jim's radio show 1380 am in Baton Rouge. It is streamed live on the worldwide web at [www.talk1380.com](http://www.talk1380.com) from 9:00 until 11:00 am, weekdays.