

Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### SHOULD NEW ORLEANS HOLD AN ELECTION?

The regular election date for citywide elections throughout New Orleans is less than two months away. The state's elections office is recommending that the election be postponed. Because of all that's happened throughout the greater New Orleans area, does it make sense to postpone the election for the next mayor and other city officials? The answer is no.

Elections officials in the Secretary of State's office are saying that it will be almost impossible to hold this regularly scheduled election in a normal fashion. They point out that thousands of voters have temporarily moved away from the city, and that many precinct locations have either been destroyed or are inoperable. There's no doubt that it will be difficult to carry on normal election activities.

But there is more at stake here. A lot more. It's of major importance to show the rest of the country that this area is bouncing back, and is capable of carrying on normal governmental functions. Most of the major Carnival Krewes that parade throughout New Orleans have announced that their parades and Mardi Gras will go on as normal. So the city is able to put on a bonanza celebration, but apparently cannot handle a one-day election.

The whole world watched just a few months ago as elections were being held in Iraq. A number of people risked their lives just to get to the polling locations. But it was important to show the world that they were capable of carrying on the normal functions of government

We have a system in place where servicemen serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the world can vote by absentee ballot. Yes, it's true that thousands of New Orleanians are spread throughout the country. But they will be able to absentee vote, just like servicemen overseas, if they can not make it back to New Orleans on Election Day.

What about the difficulty in setting up polling locations? There are provisions in the laws that allow consolidation of voting precincts. A large gym or warehouse could be used to set up a number of polling locations, particularly in areas like the Ninth Ward that are sparsely populated.

Not enough voting machines? Hey, it's not a big state. What's the problem in trucking in voting machines from other parishes? Poll workers? Surely many regular poll workers would give a day to handle a polling precinct in New Orleans. They could be bused in for the day. Lots of folks are looking for a way to be of help.

You are reading a guy who handled more elections than any other living Secretary of State during the time I held this post in the 1980s. This election can be held without major problems. And it's important to let the rest of the country know that the system down here is up and running and Louisianans can do the job.

And how about the issue of appointing the next Secretary of State? Bad idea. Do we give control to the Governor? How does this reduce political considerations?

The Secretary of State's office has traditionally been considered one of the best run offices in Louisiana, going back to Wade Martin's service in this position. Rarely has there been any controversy. During the time that I held this post, the Public Affairs Research Council called the department the best run, most efficient office in state government. Fox McKeithen carried on this tradition.

Louisiana has, hands down, the finest State Archives in America, an important division of the Secretary of State's office. Paul Hardy envisioned a new archives in the 70s, yours truly built it in the 80s and Fox McKeithen developed it in the 90s.

It will take a vote of the legislature and a constitutional amendment voted on by the people to change this important office from elective to appointed. If it ain't broke, why are we trying to fix it? The Secretary of State's office should be left alone.

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Ninety-eight percent of the adults in this country are decent, hard-working, honest Americans. It's the other lousy two percent that get all the publicity. But then we elected them.

- Lily Tomlin

Politicians fascinate because they constitute such a paradox; they are an elite that accomplishes mediocrity for the public good.

- George Will

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 ready his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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