

**Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004**  
**Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**NATIONAL PARTIES HAVE LITTLE TO SHOW  
FOR THEIR LOUISIANA EFFORT**

Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco held a poverty conference last week decrying the state's "bottom-of-the-barrel" rankings on a number of "quality-of-life" lists. We can't even get it right in bringing the national election cycle to an end. Louisiana, again, was dead last in completing national elections.

And neither party has much to cheer about. South Louisiana's Third District, which is shaped like a boot around New Orleans, eclipsed the decade-old Edwards-Duke race as the nastiest race ever held. The *National Journal* magazine called it flat-out the "dirtiest race in congressional history." That's saying a lot, even for Louisiana. One would have thought from watching all of the negative television spots that the Third District had the whole nation watching with bated breath. You would have thought the whole future direction of the country was on the line. But when all was said and done, south Louisiana voters were either turned off or turned out. Many voters were so disgusted with the tone of the campaign that they stayed away in droves. Others held their noses, even flipped a coin, and reluctantly voted. The final turnout of the Third District was 27 percent, one of the lowest levels of participation for a congressional district race anywhere in the country.

Billy Tauzin, III ended up being hurt more by the low turnout. Traditional wisdom and experience shows that the Democratic vote falls off when there are few other races on the ballot. But the tone of the campaign turned off a number of Republican leaning voters who would have normally voted for Tauzin. And he could not get the local folks to show up in any significant numbers. His home parish of Lafourche matched the district turnout. In areas where Tauzin should have run quite strong, the turnout dropped off even more dramatically. St. Bernard, always a strong Tauzin family base, had less than 23 percent of voters going to the polls. Many voters were also turned off by the automated phone calls that peppered the district from throughout the country. Callers on local radio shows were complaining that they were receiving 15-20 automated calls, no live voice, for the Tauzin campaign. Often the calls came at meal time or in the evening. They became a nuisance, in many cases, and hurt the Tauzin effort more than it helped.

When all was said and done, there were three factors that made the difference in getting Democrat "Charlie boy" Melancon elected. First, he "parochialized" the race and established the fact that there really was not any difference between the two candidates' views on issues affecting the district. He made the point that the Bush administration had not really been that helpful to south Louisiana, and that he would pledge to work with both parties to help the local economy. Little to brag about in this part of the state from

republicans when you consider the lack of support on important local issues like sugar, shrimp imports, steel tariffs and coastal erosion. So the Bush momentum did not make that much difference throughout the Third District.

Second, he received a big break when third-place finisher Senator Craig Romero's bitterness overflowed in the final weeks of the runoff. Campaign ads against Romero by the Tauzin camp in the first primary were about as vicious as you can get. Romero held a grudge, and didn't hold back his feelings. Tauzin's vote total had a big fall off in the northern part of the district where Romero's influence is significant.

And third, the Melancon team hit the streets with over 1,000 volunteers, many from out of state, who went door-to-door throughout the district. The personal touch of someone knocking on a voter's door was in sharp contrast to the recorded telephone messages that were received from the Tauzin campaign.

Melancon won by 569 votes. A little change in the strategy here and there could have made the same total switch to Tauzin. "Little Billy" isn't going anywhere, and Melancon has his work cut out for him in mending fences and addressing Louisiana issues. If he doesn't hit the ground running, no one should be surprised if we see a re-run in two years.

Over in the Seventh District (southwest Louisiana), Doctor Charles Boustany's initial name recognition was minimal. But his momentum started building about a month before the first primary, and never stopped. When all is said and done, he would have won either as a Democrat or Republican. The doctor was a fresh face bringing no baggage as an established politician. Voters were just too saturated with the same old political messages from traditional politicians. It wasn't Senator Willie Mount's fault. She just was on the receiving end of "political overload." First the Governor's race last year, then the vicious congressional races that seemed to go on and on and on. Third-place finisher Senator Don Cravins carried his bitterness against the state Democratic Party into the runoff, and Mount was hurt by his efforts.

Boustany was perceived as the good guy. The heart doctor who saved people's lives. He wasn't tainted by politics, and he was Mr. Clean, in the image of U.S. Senate majority leader (and doctor) Bill Frist. He was well financed, initially with his own money, and being Lebanese helped the good doctor, since there is a strong base of Lebanese Americans located throughout the Seventh District.

He lived in the largest parish, Lafayette, which had not had a congressman from its area in recent memory. All in all, he just had too many "parochial" things going for him. It did not matter whether he was Republican or Democrat. When all was said and done, as the campaign crested in the final weeks, he was almost "destined" to win.

So what can either national party glean and find solace from the election results? Not much. Both congressmen will be moderate to conservative on most key issues. It's a washout.

As for the two national parties, they both would have done better to save their money. In the final analysis, the millions that were spent in both campaigns on ads produced out of Washington did not really make any difference. Maybe it's a good message that after this, the national parties stay in Washington, save their money, and stay out of the affairs of Louisiana voters.

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So are we finally through with election activity for a while? Can we enjoy the Christmas Holidays and put aside the political jockeying through the coming year? Not a chance. The 2007 Louisiana statewide election is a long way off. But several ambitious legislators are continuing to raise money, give speeches throughout the state, and build the early foundation for a possible future statewide race.

At the top of the list of potential statewide candidates, considering his present world-wind schedule is Dry Creek State Senator James David Cain. Few have been around as long as James David who always tells listeners that all three of his names are biblical. He is known for his quick wit, country humor, and backroom compromise a la Senator John Breaux and the national scene. He's made major inroads with insurance groups throughout the state, having recently taken over as Chairman of the Senate Insurance Committee. And he has been the single major opponent to the "Stelly Plan" that ended up raising taxes on hundreds of thousands of middle and upper income Louisiana residents.

Right now, Cain is moving "below radar." But he is speaking three to four times a week throughout the state espousing physically conservative issues and bemoaning the underpinning of the state's middle class.

His options? Agriculture Commissioner if the worst scenario happens to present Commissioner Bob Odom. Maybe Lieutenant Governor if incumbent Mitch Landrieu looks for other options in three years. In the meantime, Cain will continue to travel the state, raising a cross section of issues to discuss and criticize. As the Senator says in picking on targets of change needed in state government: "I feel like a mosquito in a nudist colony. I don't know where to strike first; there are so many things I could jump on."

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**"I have a lot of friends convicted of felonies.—A lot of people are uptight about that. I'm not.**

Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee

*“Regarding 9/11, every bureaucracy in this town is scared to death of an investigation. Remember no one has really been held accountable. No one has lost their job, no one has been even reprimanded, nothing has happened as a result of September 11. Unless responsibility is assigned, then we can’t cure the problem.”*

- Senator John McCain

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

