

Thursday, December 17, 2003

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

THE FEDS CONTINUE TO STICK IT TO US

As the new governor comes closer to taking office in January, balancing the state budget and turning over dollars into the Louisiana economy become top priorities. Where does she look to find immediate help? She might start by calling our congressional delegation together, and make a major push to get “our fair share” out of Washington, D.C.

For years, federal formulas have been devised that have done great damage to the Louisiana economy. Louisiana taxpayers are subsidizing numerous programs in other states throughout the country. A few examples:

- 1) Federal highway funds. A federal gas tax is charged on every gallon of gasoline that goes into a national highway fund to build highways. For years, a formula has been used to distribute the money that has worked against Louisiana. For every dollar we send to Washington, Louisiana taxpayers are getting a little more than ninety cents back. California receives \$1.30 back for every dollar they send in, the same for most of the states along the east coast. Louisiana taxpayers are subsidizing roads and bicycle trails throughout California, New York and many other states.

A report released last week pointing out the Louisiana is tremendously under funded in its effort to improve the quality of our roads. One big reason is that we are paying substantially more into the federal pot that we are getting out. This is one good place for the governor to start.

- 2) Louisiana receives federal reimbursement to nursing homes that take care of the poor under the Medicaid program. But the formula works dramatically against Louisiana nursing homes. Where patients in New York nursing homes receive reimbursement of \$175.00 a day, the same patient in Louisiana only receives \$79.00 a day. Some states are receiving four times what Louisiana gets. Alaska, for example, receives \$317.00 per day for Medicaid patient reimbursement. Louisiana has the lowest reimbursement amount in the country. This, of course, makes it more difficult for Louisiana nursing homes to provide adequate care, and there is significantly less money turned over in our economy. There may be a slight higher cost of living in New York in other states with much higher reimbursement. But three times our cost? Come on! Give us a break! We're just not being treated fairly.
- 3) Medicare reimbursement for seniors. Again, Louisiana is at the bottom of the barrel in reimbursement for payments to hospitals and medical facilities to cover

the cost of citizens who receive Medicare. The fact that we have a higher percentage of older people living in our state works against us. If anything, it should be just the reverse. The formula for Medicare reimbursement is out-of-date, and is grossly unfair to Louisiana citizens. Again, the federal formula stops Louisiana from infusing enough dollars in the medical community, and we are not seeing the turnover of spending in the Louisiana economy.

- 4) Louisiana gets the shaft when it comes to our state receiving any royalty money from the hundreds of millions of dollars the federal government makes off of oil and gas in Louisiana waters. All one has to do is drive down to Grand Isle to see the massive oil production that takes place off of our coast. And there are direct costs to every taxpayer in our state. We are spending state tax dollars to subsidize this offshore drilling, yet we do not get one penny in return. ZERO! ZILCH! NOTHING!

What are our costs? We supply the infrastructure for the oil and gas industry to move offshore. We give police and fire protection for the crew and supply boats going to and from the rigs. We educate the children of workers who are employed on the rigs. We rescue those same workers when foul weather approaches. Yet we get nothing in return.

That's not the case in several other states, including Alaska. Oil and gas is also drilled on the coast of Alaska. Did you know that Alaskans pay no income tax or statewide sales tax? And it goes much beyond this. Every man, woman, and child is given a check every year because of the oil and gas production. This year's check will be a little over \$1,000.00 a person. In some years, when production was higher, every Alaskan got as much as \$2,000.00. They are in no different position than we are. These minerals are part of our state, and we are spending millions of dollars to give support to this industry. Yet nothing is returned.

Back in the 1950's, President Eisenhower at first offered to give Louisiana 50% of all the royalty interest in this offshore drilling. Our state officials balked at making a quick decision, and then the offer was withdrawn. If we had accepted this arrangement, there would be no taxes of any kind in Louisiana today. And each one of us would have been receiving a regular check, far in excess of what Alaskans are receiving.

No, we can't turn back the clock and get that same deal. But fair is fair. Something ought to come back to Louisiana.

So there you are Governor. A few ideas to get our economy churning. An early meeting with our congressional delegation would be a good start.

A few of the “behind the scene” winners in the last statewide election.

- 1) Leonard Kleinpeter, Governor-Elect Blanco’s current Chief of Staff. With Leonard it was either going to be “three’s a charm” or “three strikes and you’re out”! This is Leonard’s third major role in a governor’s race and he obviously learned from other candidates’ mistakes of the past.

In 1979, Leonard was serving as first assistant to then Secretary of State Paul Hardy. When Hardy ran for governor, Leonard rolled up his sleeves and was active in the campaign effort. Hardy didn’t make it. Strike one.

In 1987, Leonard continued to serve as the first assistant to then the Secretary of State, yours truly, who also ran for governor. Leonard played a key role in the effort, the Brown campaign was squeezed from both the left and the right, and yours truly finished out of money. For Leonard, strike two!

Leonard Kleinpeter has to be one of the most personable people you will ever meet. I don’t know of anybody who ever met Leonard that didn’t consider him a friend. As chief of staff for the Lieutenant Governor, he criss-crossed the state on behalf of Kathleen Blanco. If you wanted to plug into the Blanco campaign, Leonard was the fellow to call. In the last few weeks of the campaign, he made the final push with the Governor-elect and hit a home run.

If you want to see the new governor elect in the months to come, Leonard will no doubt be the person you have to go through. For him, three was definitely a charm.

2. Val Marmillion – Marmillion has been a major influence in a number of state campaigns in the past twenty years. His first claim to fame was in 1996 when then Congressman John Breau called him in to reorganize his Senate campaign. Val took the issue of the voter purge and the attempted suppression of African American registration/participation. He was credited for refocusing the Breau campaign and developing a strategy to build and maintain momentum, and defeated frontrunner Henson Moore.

In the late 1990’s, Marmillion teamed up with Baton Rouge consultant Rannah Gray to play a major role in several key campaigns. In 2002 when Mary Landrieu was forced into a runoff with Suzie Terrell, Landrieu called on Marmillion to develop strategies and messages for the runoff. Val and Rannah pulled together a series of late spots and appearances on the issue of the secret sugar deal being proposed by the Bush administration, and turned the focus of the election to Louisiana issues instead of national issues. A particularly notable spot was one shot in Val’s Washington, D.C. living room featuring Senator John Breau

pointing out Landrieu's record of standing up for Louisiana. He organized a rally at a sugar mill in south Louisiana two days before the election, helping Landrieu control the debate in the final week, and go on to a major victory.

In early 2003, Mitch Landrieu hired Marmillion and Gray as his media consultants to develop a message that positioned him as a cutting edge progressive young leader ready to help bring prosperity to Louisiana. Using key issues from his legislative record – support of biotechnology, ecotourism and economic development, and a message theme developed around the concept of letting Louisiana's light "shine" - Mitch defeated five other candidates including a former Congressman and a former Lt. Governor, to win the primary.

After the primary election, the state Democratic Party asked Val and Rannah to help hone the Democratic message in the runoff election that helped elect Kathleen Blanco Governor. To differentiate the two candidates, Marmillion and Gray developed a strategy to focus on Jindal's record involving healthcare issues. They introduced the fact that a millionaire Republican donor from Indiana was financing a media campaign in Louisiana on the voucher issue on urban radio stations in an attempt to confuse African-Americans voters and discourage them from voting. Marmillion and Gray effectively disclosed that this individual had been part of the largest political corruption scandal in Wisconsin for a similar tactic.

It would be an understatement to say that both Marmillion and Gray know how to effectively develop winning message strategies for Democratic candidates, and have made a major impact on campaigns in both Washington and Louisiana state issues. Look for Marmillion and Gray to be involved in key congressional and U. S. Senate races next year.

3. George Kennedy – George has been handling political races in Louisiana for a number of years, but his star really began to shine in the past election. He worked particularly close with Marmillion and Gray in putting together the Landrieu campaign spots. Most observers called Landrieu's TV by far the best of any statewide candidate.

But he was particularly effective on the local front. Senator Jay Dardenne hired Kennedy when he initially found himself in a hotly contested race with fellow republican Chris Warner. You would have thought you were watching President Kennedy in pensive thought as Dardenne meandered around the state capitol senate chamber. His almost black and white images portrayed Dardenne as a deep thinker working tirelessly for the people of his district. May be a little melodramatic, but it sure worked. Dardenne won going away.

The big challenge for Kennedy was to jump into the open warfare that took place in Ascension parish. More than one-third of the voters in this area are new and are both conservative and opinionated. They are the kind of voters

that want something different and perhaps a little offbeat; surprisingly, folks who as well might be impressed by the Presidential message of Howard Dean. Candidates new and old were going to have to “reintroduce” themselves through television, and Kennedy certainly rose to the challenge.

He used sharp humor representing challenger Eddie Lambert in taking on twenty-eight year incumbent state rep Juba Diez. Juba took himself too seriously and Kennedy’s fast-moving, quick witted commercials brought many of these new voters to the Lambert camp.

He took a more serious approach in the senate race where Jody Amedee pulled an upset victory over Jeff Diez. Diez had previously run against Louis Lambert, and some thought he had the upper hand. But the Amedee campaign, by spending a lot of money and hanging on the “focused message” developed by Kennedy, won resoundingly.

With the democrats in strong control of state and local politics, look for Marmillion, Gray and Kennedy to be behind the scene advisors and strategists for a number of years to come.

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK

Blanco gets “F” in Buzz Poll

An online article written by BayouBuzz.com publisher Steve Sabludowsky reports that 92% of those voting gave the new governor an “F” while 3% have “honored” her with an “A”.

Now let me get this straight. The new governor was only elected three weeks ago, does not take office until the middle January, yet readers of BayouBuzz (conservative to say the least) are already “circling overhead.”

Come on now gang....give the lady a break. Let her at least serve three weeks “in office” before the knit picking starts.

Ole Miss is an institutional symbol, a pseudo genteel outpost of brainless young beauties, incipient drunks, and winning football teams. Faulkner was not allowed to speak there.

Author: Willie Morris

We do many things at the federal level that would be considered dishonest and illegal if done in the private sector.

Donald T. Reagan, White House Chief of Staff

Peace and Justice to you and your family,

Jim Brown