

Thursday, June 3rd, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

SHAKE-UP IN THE LOUISIANA U.S. SENATE RACE

The conventional wisdom of political watchers throughout Louisiana is that the field running for the open senate seat of retiring incumbent John Breaux is pretty well set. And some newspapers have already awarded a runoff spot to Congressman David Vitter. A column in the state's largest paper last week declared Vitter a "cinch" to lead the field after the first primary. Don't count on it. A new candidate could well be in the hunt.

David Duke is back home after a year-long "vacation" at a federal prison in Big Spring, Texas, and he hasn't slowed down a bit. There was some early talk that he would be a candidate for Vitter's open first congressional district seat. There is no prohibition stopping a convicted felon from running for any federal public office. But this would be small potatoes for Duke. He's quietly telling friends that a Senate campaign is more to his liking and fits his current agenda well.

From Duke's perspective, congressmen are a dime a dozen. There's little national interest in a local congressional campaign. But a U. S. Senate race has nationwide interest, and Duke is telling friends he can generate significant campaign funds all over the country.

Duke is about to start on a cross-country tour and will openly oppose President Bush's re-election efforts. Duke opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning and feels this opposition will bring him additional support.

And there's no love lost between Duke and Vitter. Duke wants to be part of a "stop Vitter" effort to repay the congressman for a number of negative comments made about Duke, which then brings us to another name reconsidering the race.

Buddy Roemer flirted with a campaign for a few months, then said no. But a Duke candidacy has made him take a second look. Roemer could be close to selling the bank he founded, so the timing could be just right. He will have both time and dollars. And if Duke runs, the percentages to make the run-off drop considerably. With six major candidates in the mix, 20 % of the vote can get you in the run-off, and the former governor feels like that's a doable number for him.

In a race where there are a number of high profile candidates, a lot of jockeying will take place in the next two months. It's much too early to handicap who will make the run off in November.

More on America's Abu Graibs

In a May 13th column, I wrote about the despicable conditions that often take place in American prisons. Sure, we should be deeply concerned about abuse of prisoners in Iraq, but don't kid yourself. Inmates in many U.S. prisons are frequently subjected to the same grotesque treatment. I have been overwhelmed with email responses from people all over the country who share a similar concern. Yes, many of the messages I've received are from family members of inmates who have been abused -- some from the former prisoners themselves. But I've also heard from former prison officials, reporters and others who want to share a story or experience.

And let's be up front about it and tell it like it is and has been for many years. This country's proud history has always had a fault line that has run through atrocities that equal anything we've learned from Iraq. The torture that went on at Andersonville, the Civil War prison run by Confederates where more than 13,000 died horrible deaths. The slaughter at Wounded Knee, and the massacre at My Lai. And we all have seen pictures of shameless Americans posing underneath the victims of lynchings for decades after the Civil War.

Some of the comments written to me:

A reporter in New York wrote: "A study in 2001 concluded that 20% of all male prisoners had been raped, partly because prison officials refused to intervene in what they sneeringly call "lovers' quarrels."

A Texas lawyer wrote of an investigation there where "Many inmates credibly testified to the existence of violence, rape and extortion in the prison system and about their own suffering from such abysmal conditions."

From Utah, I learned that an inmate died recently while shackled to a restraining chair for 16 hours. He suffered from schizophrenia and was kept naked the whole time.

From Jonathan Cohn who writes for *The New Republic*: "If people are in jail, we seem to think they deserve whatever happens to them. Why, then, are Americans acting so shocked by the prisoner mistreatment in Iraq?"

Last year, Attorney General Ashcroft appointed a team of "experts" to restore Iraq's criminal justice system. He announced: "Now all Iraqis can taste liberty in their native land, and we can help make that freedom permanent by assisting them to establish an equitable criminal justice system based on the rule of law and standards of basic human rights." The bar on these standards is pretty low in Iraq right now. But it's even worse in prisons all over the United States.

If Iraqi prisoners were treated like animals, isn't this really nothing more than an extension of the way we treat many prisoners right here at home? Or does anyone really care?

I normally would not make reference to an article in a national publication entitled “**Easy Money: Louisiana’s Culture of Official Corruption.**” Especially when I am prominently discussed in the article. But a new insurance journal, *Leader’s Edge*, published out of Washington, D.C., gives a good overview of Louisiana’s recent political problems and scandals.

You can read the entire article by going to
<http://www.jimbrownla.com/columns/EasyMoney.html>

MARTHA NEEDS TO GET REAL

Week after week, I have criticized the unfair prosecution of Martha Stewart. She’s not charged with committing any crime, but **is** charged with making false statements. We found out last week that an FBI agent who testified against her, has now been charged with **lying himself**. So when the accuser is a **liar**, it would seem she should have a pretty good case on appeal.

But Martha did herself little good this week by asking the trial judge to let her stay out of jail and spend time training women to do cleaning in local hotels. She would perform this community service by working – get this – 20 **hours a week!** That’s right. **4 hours a day!** Come on, Martha. You’ve got to do better than that. You want to stay out of jail by spending a few hours a day doing a bit of instructing, then dash off to your normal life. Let me let you in on something: It ain’t going to happen.

You might have had an “outside” chance to do some type of community service by working in the range of **60 hours a week** then back to a halfway house. But you are asking way too much for way too little.

Your lawyers blew it last time by letting you talk to the FBI in the first place. They should have read you the Jim Brown rule. Even if you are innocent and have nothing to hide, **particularly if you are innocent and have nothing to hide**, never talk to the FBI. That was the conclusion reached by a number of Louisiana newspapers who followed my case.

Unfortunately, your lawyers did not give you this advice and now you are in a heck of a mess. But **20 hours a week** is not going to solve your problem. I hope you have better lawyers this time to pursue what should be a good appeal. Otherwise, like the old song says, you’ll be “shuffling off to Buffalo.”

I spent several years in a North Vietnamese prison camp, in the dark fed with scraps. Do you think I want to do that all over again as vice president of the United States?"

Sen. John McCain

"To announce that there must be no criticism of the president..... right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public."

Teddy Roosevelt, 1918.

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown