

Thursday, July 15, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

LA FIFTH DISTRICT CONGRESSIONAL RACE HEATS UP

Just a few weeks ago, Louisiana 5th District Congressman Rodney Alexander looked like he might get by with only minor opposition in this fall's election. Maybe even a free ride. But all that has changed. The GOP is some mad that Alexander toyed with changing parties, then went running back to the Democrats. So who is the new Republican standard bearer?

Former State Representative Jock Scott will formally announce for the north Louisiana seat on August 7th. And the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee has promised major support.

Scott is a former three term state legislator who practices law in Alexandria. He lost a close race for Congress as a Democrat in 1985 to Clyde Holloway, who until recently also flirted with making the race again.

According to Scott, Alexander began serious discussions with the Republican leadership in the House several months ago. The bargaining chip, from House Speaker Dennis Haslett, was a seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee being vacated by Congressman David Vitter. Vitter gives up the seat in his quest to replace John Breaux in the U.S. Senate, so the plum was being dangled at Alexander as another reason to switch.

Enter John Breaux and the Washington Democratic hardballers. Rodney would be painted a traitor if he bailed out and there certainly would be major Democratic opposition. A number of Democratic challengers showed immediate interest including Ferriday Rep. Bryan Hammett and Winnsboro State Sen. Noble Ellington (both term limited). Add to that list Mayor Dave Norris of West Monroe and Mayor Ned Randolph of Alexandria, and there was no doubt Rodney was going to have his hands full.

Once the incumbent was back in the fold, the GOP grumbling began. Congressman Billy Tauzin told friends that Rodney will be "in no man's land....a man without a country." Scott feels Alexander "is a nice guy, but will be a bystander when important decisions are being made. Neither party will be comfortable with him."

Scott wants to take some of the \$1.7 million budget of the 5th District congressional office and hire an economic development specialist to work with local officials. He will be touting this and other ideas in his announcement tour the first week in August.

Money will be the major component needed by Scott. Bush will carry the 5th and the President's coattails will help. But this congressional district is spread out more than any other in the state. It takes in all of north and most of central Louisiana, then drifts down

through West Feliciana Parish almost to Baton Rouge. This means television buys for an effective campaign in four major markets (Shreveport, Alexandria, Monroe and Baton Rouge). Both candidates are conservative, so talk radio will also be an important campaign advertising tool (get ready Moon Griffon). Bottom line? Money! Alexander is way ahead in fund raising at this time with some \$550,000 in the bank. Scott will report \$100,000 when he announces. It will take some \$250,000 to adequately cover the district before Election Day

The GOP in Washington has listed this race as a top ten possible acquisition (number eight to be exact.) But it's going to take a major infusion of Republican PAC money for Scott to have a decent chance. Lee Fletcher, a Monroe public relations exec who came within a whisker of beating Alexander two years ago, agrees that Scott has an uphill fight: "Rodney votes like a Republican and is a nice guy. It's going to take a major effort to unseat him. And he's a hard campaigner. Nobody knows that better than me."

In 1986, Jock Scott wrote a novel about politics in Louisiana. It was called "To the Victor." A young reformer from central Louisiana challenged the incumbent, and after a bitter race, won an upset victory. Scott will find out this fall whether his next chapter is fact or fiction.

LA SENATE RACE UPDATE

Here's a quiz. What candidate for U. S. Senate brought in for support at a major rally a pro-abortion, pro-gay rights and marriage, and pro-stem cell research speaker? Was it Author Morrell? How about John Kennedy? Chris John votes so conservative (last year, he voted against the Democratic Leadership 33% of the time), but was he the one? All wrong. The candidate who brought in the flaming liberal was none other than Congressman David Vitter. Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani was in Lafayette last week speaking on behalf on Vitter. Now we all know Rudy is a national hero. But isn't the President saying this election is all about values?

The Vice Prez has been to the bayou state supporting Vitter. So after the New York former mayor, who's next? Vitter may want to visit with Suzie Terrell for advice in gauging the impact of outsiders helping in a Louisiana U.S. Senate race.

Now here's where it really gets confusing. Just look at the line-up for the coming national conventions.

The Republicans open up on Monday night of their big week with four, get this, four speakers who are pro-choice, pro gay marriage and pro stem cell research. Rudy Giuliani, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Gov George Pataki and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. These four are followed by Senator John McCain who supports stem cell research and is against the proposed constitutional amendment blocking same-sex marriage.

But you have to have one solid speaker that is a true conservative, who is pro-life, against gay marriage, and against stem cell research. So of course they picked a Democrat, Senator Zell Miller from Georgia.

And not to be outdone, the Democrats will headline, as a main speaker, none other than Ronald Reagan, Jr., son of the GOP's extremely popular former President. So it would seem the party of values is opting to push issues, and the party of issues is now pushing values. Confused? Go figure...

VACATION TIME FOR THE SUPREME COURT

Don't you wish you had a job where you could take off for the whole summer? You can if you can just get appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. This is supposed to be the Court of last resort. But little gets done there. Or, for that matter, even gets there. Less than one percent of the cases filed at the Court are even considered. Less than **ONE** percent. Last term the court heard 74 cases, one of its lightest workloads in years.

Now we all know how busy it can be to be a member of the court. All the many things to do. Duck hunting trips to Louisiana, numerous trips around the country to speak for a fee and fly in private company jets, book deals; there are just so many distractions to keep you from your lifetime appointment.

And did you know that the justices themselves don't even decide whether to hear a case? That's right. These scholars of our country's highest legal body don't even take the time to review the appeals that are filed to determine which cases should be considered. According to a story in USA today: "Law clerks for eight of the nine justices work together to assess which appeals to the court should be heard." Law clerks, just out of law school, are deciding major constitutional issues, some even involving life or death.

Unfortunately, there is no accountability in the federal court system. Judge Burton Katz, in his book "Justice Overruled," gave this appraisal of these permanent appointments. "Federal judges are, frankly speaking, judges for life. No one can touch them. They are derisively called Article III Judges because their behavior is frequently autocratic, capricious and grandiose."

Not much can be done about the attitude of the Supreme Court. But the members should, at least, put in an occasional day's work. It's apparent our country is not getting much out of the court now.

MOVIE REVIEW

How much interest and controversy has *Fahrenheit 9/11* stirred up? Just type in the title on the internet. At last count, there were more than 2,120,000 postings. And many of those sites lead to other sites for more articles and commentary. Michael Moore's film has been touted as "the highest grossing documentary of all time." But it's really not a documentary. Much of the film is his opinion. And he is entitled to it. His contemptuous relish is no different that what the Rush Limbaughs on the right stir up every day.

Just as *The Passion of the Christ* stirred up the deepest of emotions, Moore's film plays to the faithful. *Fahrenheit* raises legitimate questions as to what are the boundaries between political sabotage, artful propaganda, telling it like it seems and proffering truth.

Which brings up what could be a more "fair and balanced" movie. *Control Room*, now playing at most local theatres, is closer to being a documentary and is about Al-Jazeera, the Arab satellite news channel. The film follows the reporting of the war in Iraq and inquires into the way events are filtered into news from both the U.S. and Arab perspectives. It concludes that one side's reporting becomes the other side's distortion.

Al-Jazeera was launched in 1996, was the first independent news channel in the Middle East, and soon became the most popular news channel with over 40 million Arab viewers. A number of Arab leaders have criticized the station for being much too negative of Arab political activities. Yet Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld calls Al-Jazeera "Osama Bin-Laden's mouthpiece."

The film effectively covers the importance of media and propaganda in any war. It shows that both sides bring perceptions of vested, conflicted interests to the evasive goal called journalistic balance. The film is "essential viewing," says *The Wall Street Journal*. And it is. No editorializing. You are left to draw your own conclusions. It's really worth seeing.

(A number of local Louisiana newspapers are now carrying Jim's weekly column. We welcome readers of the Riverside Reader, the source for news in West Baton Rouge, published in Port Allen, LA.

Jim will file his column next week from Lake Tahoe, Nevada, where he will be speaking to the Western States Surplus Lines Conference, a gathering of major insurance brokers from throughout the western United States.)

*"A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth
has a chance to get its pants on.*

Sir Winston Churchill

*“In the End, we will remember not the words of our
enemies, but the silence of our friends.”*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Peace and Justice

Jim Brown