

Thursday, July 29th, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

ROEMER OUT-VITTER STILL UNDERDOG

Buddy Roemer was tempted. Several polls, including his own, showed him either in the lead or close in the approaching U.S. Senate race. And at 62, you have to seize the opportunities at hand. But Congressman David Vitter early and effectively locked up major out-of-state GOP funding, so dollars would have been a big problem for the former Governor.

Now Vitter has the Republican nomination all to himself. But he still has an uphill fight when Election Day rolls around.

The most recent public poll, released by Market Research Institute out of Pensacola, FL last week shows:

U.S. Rep. David Vitter (R) 36%
Treasurer John Kennedy (D) 19%
U.S. Rep. Chris John (D) 18%
State Rep. Arthur Morrell (D) 6%
Undecided 21%

Roemer's candidacy would have tightened up the field and put him in the lead. But he needed the 2002 scenario with several Republican candidates running to make it work for him. The presence of several high profile Republicans running against incumbent Mary Landrieu kept the race fluid and Washington dollars uncommitted until after qualifying closed. In this race, Vitter was the first to announce, and quickly sewed up Washington Republican PAC dollars. Roemer would have had to raise most of his money locally. He just waited too late to fund an effective campaign.

Kennedy to some degree has the same problem Roemer encountered. It's a fact of life that in many races for the U.S. Senate, 70% of the contributions flood in from out of state. To PACs and other special interest groups, in the Senate, a vote is a vote no matter where it comes from. Therefore, a California group, interested in passing federal legislation, is just as interested in a Louisiana Senator as one from its home state. But Kennedy so far has raised his campaign funds almost exclusively in Louisiana. He's done well with over \$1 million in the bank. But he is far outpaced by both John and Vitter due to their Washington connections.

With the help of retiring Sen. John Breaux, Congressman Chris John is raising large sums from Washington PACs. His years in Congress and the connections made there have given him a leg up in fundraising both in Louisiana and throughout the country. The same Washington relationships have been exploited by Vitter. John is sitting on \$2.5 million in campaign funds, while Vitter has a bank account filled with \$ 3.4 million.

So what's the prognosis with some ninety days to go?

Vitter, though leading in the polls and sitting on top of the biggest war chest, still has a long road ahead. He is hurt by the polarization taking place on the national level. Bush may carry Louisiana, but the Democrats are energized. Democratic leaders on both the state and national level want to keep this seat in their column. Note that all the Democratic statewide officials were in Boston this week. Only Republican SOS Fox McKeithen was absent from the Demo love fest, and he has never been a diehard in the GOP. Rumors persist that he could switch parties in the near future.

And John Breaux is not going to leave quietly. He nominates Sen. John Edwards for Vice President tonight in Boston, and still wants to keep a hand on who will replace him in Louisiana. Right now, he's in the John camp. But he will jump actively in with Kennedy if the Treasurer makes the run-off.

Breaux is a big help to John, who is not known nearly as well as Kennedy statewide. And the Crowley native is getting better on the stump. He was a little hesitant in his speeches when he first announced, but has improved over the past few months. Some observers are wondering why he has not been traveling the state more. But he set his priorities early. Raise the money he will need in the last two months before the primary.

Kennedy can run against the "Washington Crowd." And he has some issues to raise. Louisiana has been shortchanged in receiving federal funds in a number of areas compared to many other states, including highways, Medicaid, and Medicare reimbursement. The recent Republican opposition to coastal erosion funds for Louisiana will be a strong issue for Kennedy, particularly against Vitter.

For Kennedy, it also all comes down to dollars. He is going to have to raise at least two thirds of what John raises. Though perceived as a little more moderate than John, he still has been effective in gathering key black leaders. Congressman. Bill Jefferson is reportedly in the Kennedy camp as is Sen. Cleo Fields. But he has to not let John get too far ahead in fund raising.

Several political prognosticators have suggested that a big Bush win in Louisiana will be a boost for Vitter. Don't bet on it. The whole Bush team was in Louisiana opposing Mary Landrieu, and she won solidly. The Republicans will have to explain their opposition to strong Louisiana priorities including sugar quotas and wetlands funding. Chris John is labeled a "Blue Dog Democrat" and doesn't always toe the party line. And John Kennedy can rap a number of Louisiana issues around Vitter to defuse any Kerry backlash. So party labels won't be quite as important in this election. It's going to be more of who will fight for Louisiana interests rather than espousing the priorities of either national party.

What about Rep. Arthur Morrell? He's a former Army Ranger and quite articulate on how Louisiana has been shortchanged by Congress. Again, the lack of funds will keep his vote total low.

So what are the odds? They are made with the assumption that Breaux really stumps for John, and Kennedy is able to stay close to John in fundraising. I'm told there are places to lay down a bet.

Chris John 2/1
John Kennedy 2/1
David Vitter 7/2
Arthur Morrell 35/1

Stay tuned. The odds will be adjusted as the campaign progresses.

FINAL ADVICE TO MARTHA

Martha Stewart came out as well as she could have expected at her sentencing. She received the minimum jail time (5 months) and a minor fine. Then 5 months of home confinement. And having to stay at home isn't too bad. After all, Martha doesn't live in a trailer park.

My advice is to go ahead and get her sentence out of the way. The federal court system moves at a snail's pace. She can serve the time and write a sure-to-be best seller while she is at it. Then be back in her business by this time next year. The public is generally forgiving and has a short memory.

I can vouch for the short memory. So far this week, I've had 5 people stop me to tell me to "keep up the good work" in fighting those insurance companies to keep rates down. And two people asked me how preparations for the coming election were going. (For you young readers, I finished serving eight years as Secretary of State 17 years ago.)

So Martha, start your sentence, pay your minor fine, leave the rest to your lawyers, and go back to your charmed life. A lot of people who were convicted of doing less would like to be in your shoes. Except we couldn't afford them.

Hands down, the most amusing political video cartoon, that picks at both Presidential candidates, was put up by the young guys at JibJab.com. It's worth a minute to watch. Go to <http://www.jibjab.com>.

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

