

Friday, August 20th, 2004
Columbia, South Carolina

ARE PRIDE AND YOUTH MISSING IN LOUISIANA?

Columbia, on paper, sounds a lot like Baton Rouge. The state capitol is located there. So is South Carolina's largest university. It's about the size of Baton Rouge, and even has three good size rivers running through it. (The Saluda, the Broad and the Congaree.) Instead of looking west to Austin, Texas for a role model, the Baton Rouge leadership might do well to look east and what's happening in Columbia.

The differences are marked. The downtown in Columbia is vibrant and alive. There are restaurants and music clubs along the main river. The names are interesting...many with a Louisiana flavor. The Gumbo Grill, The Oyster Bar, The Armadillo Oil Co., and the Blue Dog Café. Young people flood the downtown area at night. A popular minor league baseball team downtown brings out an older crowd.

The city is clean. Traffic lights are synchronized and it's both easy and quick to get around.

I was in Columbia to attend a reception for an old friend who is retiring as South Carolina's top insurance regulator, and moving to a new position in Chicago. Attending was a South Carolina legislator who was the Republican majority leader. He has a number of relatives in South Louisiana..

"You really live in a great place," he told me. "The people in Louisiana are so down to earth and friendly. Your food is unbelievable. I really enjoy coming to your state."

We talked about the differences between our two states. "Gosh, you have so much going for you that we don't," he said. "You feed and fuel the rest of the country. Your music, your artists, and I have to admit you have a pretty fair football team."

Another state official joined our conversation. "You folks are your own worst enemy. Why do you beat up on yourselves so much? From your local news, one would think the only place there is any political corruption is in Louisiana. Just look around the rest of the country. The Governor of New Jersey just resigned and a widespread investigation of political shenanigans is taking place. Same in Connecticut where the Governor resigned last month. The former Governor of Alabama is about to go on trial for criminal offenses and Senator Shelby there is under investigation. A hundred years from now, when something goes wrong, you folks down there will still be blaming that Edwards. For goodness sake, you have so much going for you. Why are you so tough on yourselves?"

Having been put through the ringer myself, I really didn't have much of an answer.

Another difference that stood out was the “youth factor.” The majority leader had served in the legislature for 17 years, holds the top position, and is only 39 years old. A number of people in attendance at the reception headed up major insurance associations and trade groups in South Carolina. And many were in their early thirties. There are a number of young people that hold key positions in the Department of Insurance. It struck me that you don’t find such young involvement, at least at the same level, around both Baton Rouge and the state capitol. How many legislators or city and state officials do you know under 40?

Maybe I’m not getting the full picture. I was only there for two days. But the differences struck me as significant. And with major elections just around the corner, what better time to put all this out on the buffet table for discussion.

Thursday, August 26th, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

5th District Congressional Update

What can we expect to happen at Monday’s session before the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in Baton Rouge involving the election challenge of Congressman Alexander’s right to run? Will they uphold or reverse Judge Allan Edwards’ decision to re-open qualifications?

Judge Edwards, you will recall, took the Solomon approach (the Bible guy, not my father-in-law). He did what most observers felt was fair and re-opened qualifications. The problem is that the election code doesn’t give him this leeway. The wording is clear that you only open the re-qualifying time if there is a death of a candidate or no one qualifies to begin with. That’s it. No other exceptions.

Look for the Appeals Court to reverse the decision. Perhaps make Alexander run as a Democrat. The case will no doubt go on up to the Supreme Court that should affirm the Appeals Court decision.

But hold on. It ain’t gonna end there. You’re talking to an old war horse that wrote the present election code. Take a gander at R.S. 18:467, which tells candidates when they must qualify. The language says: “(3) For candidates in a congressional primary election,....on the **third** Wednesday in August of the year of the election.” But the Secretary of State’s office set the date to qualify as the **first** Wednesday in August. So why did they pick a different date you ask? Because the regular fall election date is October 2nd. But this date falls on a Jewish Holiday (Sukkoth), so everything moves back one week. You following me? Then, can you believe, the next Saturday back (September 25th) is also a Jewish holiday (Yom Kipper.) So the date to qualify moves back one more week-to August 4th. Or so the election code says. (Remember, I started all this confusion back in the 1980s).

Alright, we follow you Brother Brown. What's the problem? You should be able to guess. Federal Judges! A federal court declared that Louisiana's open primary system requires any election for federal offices (Congressman and U.S. Senator) be held on the first Tuesday in November which is also the presidential election. So the strong argument can be made that the state election date of September 25th doesn't apply and that qualifications for federal offices should have taken place on the **third** Wednesday of August instead of the **first** Wednesday. It will take a court case to clear this all up, but look for a new election challenge to be made by one of several candidates next week.

Quiet, rural northeast Louisiana has become the nation's most controversial congressional district. Stay tuned! The soap opera will continue.

Do you pay attention to bumper stickers as you drive around? I've seen a proliferation of "America" slogans. And I try to keep track. Here are some of the stickers that makes one swell with pride.

AMERICA
Almost all paved.

AMERICA
Inventor of the Gated Community

AMERICA
Just Try and Knock
That Smile off our Face

AMERICA
Proudly Serving Ritalin to
Our Children Since 1995

AMERICA
Home of Freddie Prinze Jr.

AMERICA
You Want Fries with That?

AMERICA
You'll Come for the
Religious Freedom, You'll stay
For the Capitalism

**AMERICA
Teenagers
With Money**

**AMERICA
She's Some Kinda Wonderful**

**AMERICA
Are we there yet?**

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown