

March 18, 2008

[Special Alert: House Ratings Changes](#)

AL-05	OPEN (Cramer)	Solid Democratic to Toss Up
LA-06	VACANT (Baker)	Lean Republican to Toss Up

House Editor David Wasserman explains:

Moderate nine-term Democratic Rep. Bud Cramer's decision to retire at the end of his term puts his northern Alabama district at the top of the GOP takeover target list. At a PVI of R+6, this Huntsville-based seat is seven points more Republican than any other open Democratic seat. As this is the first time the seat has been open in nearly two decades, look for a crowded field of candidates on both sides for the June 3rd primary. The race starts as a Toss Up.

Meanwhile, the special election to replace GOP Rep. Richard Baker's seat in Louisiana continues to give national Republicans heartburn. Less than three weeks away from the April 5th primary runoff, competitive primaries are playing out in both parties. Insiders on both sides agree the nomination of the current favorites – moderate Democratic state Rep. Don Cazayoux and GOP newspaper publisher Woody Jenkins – would present something akin to a perfect storm for Democrats in the May 3rd special general election.

The results of the March 8th special primary illustrated Republicans' problems in this race. Like many in the South, this Baton Rouge-based district's track record at the federal level (it gave President Bush 59 percent in 2004) flies in the face of its party registration breakdown (49.6 percent Democratic to 28.1 percent Republican). But in the special primary, turnout appeared much more reflective of party registration than federal-level performance. The fact that 47,632 Democrats and just 29,875 Republicans turned out to vote is evidence of a serious enthusiasm gap between the parties. Of course, it is difficult to gauge how the district's fundamentals have changed since Hurricane Katrina added tens of thousands of new residents to the Baton Rouge area.

To win the Democratic nomination, the folksy and socially conservative Cazayoux must first dispatch African-American state Rep. Michael Jackson, a Baton Rouge moderate whom Cazayoux described as one of his best friends and allies in the state House. Cazayoux finished ahead of Jackson in the initial primary, 35 to 27 percent, by leveraging his strong fundraising to dominate Baton Rouge airwaves. Cazayoux consolidated support around his home base in the district's more rural

parishes, but also finished a respectable second behind Jackson in East Baton Rouge parish, where the majority of votes were cast. Whereas bad blood between black and white Democrats doomed the party's chances of winning a runoff in southwestern Louisiana's 7th CD in 2004, the Cazayoux-Jackson race is unlikely to become acrimonious and Cazayoux should be considered the favorite.

The picture on the Republican side is considerably messier. Jenkins, a movement conservative who retains a strong following of evangelical voters from his 1996 Senate run, fell short of winning the nomination outright by just 76 votes in the initial primary. He now faces conservative healthcare consultant Laurinda Calongne in a heated Republican runoff. In the run up to the first round of voting, the third place GOP finisher accused Jenkins of paying a campaign firm associated with David Duke \$82,000 in consulting fees during his Senate race, and area Republicans say Calongne could take advantage of a very real anti-Jenkins sentiment in more business-oriented GOP circles. This week, Calongne launched a memorable ad spoofing Sen. Hillary Clinton's "3:00 AM" ad that has created buzz beyond the district's boundaries.

Cazayoux, much like neighboring Democratic Rep. Charlie Melancon did in 2004, could very plausibly take advantage of GOP disunity and use his rural background to cut into the heart of the district's GOP base. And in this political environment, Republicans would even be unwise to discount Jackson's bid were he to win the Democratic nomination. The presence of a third candidate in the general election, Independent former congressional aide Ashley Casey, could further endanger GOP chances of holding this seat. Casey has pledged to caucus with Republicans in the House if elected and has embarked on a decently funded effort to win the votes of moderate Republicans unsatisfied with the current crop of GOP candidates.

The bottom line: Republicans are rightly worried about losing their second consecutive seat in a special election. But this turbulent race is not yet in the bag for Democrats, and just how willing the cash-strapped NRCC will be to spend its way out of trouble remains an open question.