

Republican challenger hopes to unseat William Jefferson

SINCE 1990, 2nd District Congressman William Jefferson has been re-elected every two years, usually with minimal opposition.

In 2002, Jefferson easily crushed Public Service Commissioner Irma Muse Dixon and other candidates, garnering more than 60 percent of the vote. As he faces another election, a Republican opponent has surfaced who is promising to run a vigorous campaign to defeat the incumbent.

Art Schwertz, a Republican real estate appraiser, claims that he will raise or personally invest whatever amount is necessary to defeat Jefferson. Schwertz, a Louisiana State University graduate, lives with his wife and three sons in eastern New Orleans, the area the 2nd District encompasses. He is an active member of the Berean Bible Church in Algiers and describes himself as a Christian conservative.

Schwertz, 38, has never run for office before, but was active in Tony Perkins' campaign for U.S. Senate in 2002. In the upcoming campaign, Schwertz promises to emphasize what he feels is Jefferson's lack of attention to the district, which he believes has contributed to the worsening of pressing problems in eastern New Orleans. Schwertz cites the high crime rate, the lack of affordable housing and the poor economy as the major problems facing the district. Schwertz promises to bring the seat "back to the people" and work as a "servant-leader" to raise the quality of life for residents in the district.

Starting immediately, Schwertz will begin canvassing the district gathering signatures on a petition to gain entry to the fall ballot. The Republican candidate faces a huge challenge in the race, since the 2nd Congressional District is 61 percent African-American and Democrats enjoy a vast advantage in voter registration.

Tauzin III leads pack: Billy Tauzin III, son of the retiring 3rd District congressman, is seriously considering entering the race to replace his father. Tauzin, 30, is the clear frontrunner in the race, according to some of the early polls taken. Of course, Tauzin has the benefit of very high name recognition and is known by 80 percent of the voters, easily outdistancing his opponents.

Right now, several formidable candidates have formally jumped into the 3rd District race. If he runs, Tauzin will face fellow Republican state Sen. Craig Romero from New Iberia. On the Democratic side, state Sen. Reggie Dupre of Bourg, former American Sugar Cane lobbyist Charlie Melancon and former MetroVision executive Charmaine Caccioppi have all announced their candidacies. Tauzin has formed an exploratory committee to help him analyze the race and pick a campaign team.

Right now, Tauzin is finalizing his campaign staff; however, he will not make any final decisions until after May 1, his wedding date. Obviously, Tauzin is very busy planning for a

wedding, considering a congressional race and working in his regular job at BellSouth, where he serves as a manager of regulatory and external affairs for the company.

Residency debate: The Alliance for Good Government has now entered the debate over the New Orleans Police Department's residency requirement. In the NOPD, officers are required to live in Orleans Parish, which some believe has contributed to a severe manpower shortage for the police force.

When New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin entered office in May 2002, he announced a staffing goal for the NOPD of 2,000 officers. Despite his best efforts and a highly publicized recruiting campaign to Cleveland, the NOPD has approximately 1,600 officers. According to a recent study by the University of New Orleans, the NOPD's numbers are dropping and the vast majority of officers would like to see the residency requirement removed.

After hearing from proponents of the residency requirement, like New Orleans City Councilman Oliver Thomas, as well as representatives of the New Orleans Police Foundation, who oppose the requirement, the Alliance made its decision at a meeting last week.

It remains to be seen whether this development will create a groundswell of support for removing the requirement, which has the support of a majority of New Orleans City Council members.

Cockfighting in question: A new survey by the U.S. Humane Society clearly indicates that the voters in Louisiana want cockfighting banned. The poll paid for by the Fund for Animals showed that 82 percent of those polled want an end to cockfighting in Louisiana, which is one of only two states in the nation, along with New Mexico, to allow legal cockfighting. With the release of the poll, some legislators want to revisit this controversial issue. A bill has been filed by State Rep. Karen Carter of New Orleans to forbid promoting, conducting or attending an organized cockfight.

Nevertheless, it will not be easy to get rid of cockfighting. It has survived in this state because of legislative and congressional support. Congressman Chris John of Crowley, a U.S. Senate candidate, is known as a leading advocate of cockfighting. He calls it a "social and cultural event." John's stance could hurt him in the U.S. Senate race, considering he is in such a minority. It remains to be seen whether his three opponents will make this controversy an issue in the U.S. Senate race. •

Ringside Politics



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