

AMERICAN PRESS

How well do we know candidates?

September 30, 2007

Jim Beam
Columnist

Now that the Louisiana election for governor is only three weeks away, what do we really know about the four major candidates? Voters had their first opportunity to see all of them together for the first time during a Thursday night statewide television forum, but they didn't learn a lot more than they already knew.

U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal, the Republican front-runner, held his own despite a few digs from the other three. Democrat Foster Campbell used the forum to repeatedly push his proposed tax on oil and gas processed in Louisiana.

State Sen. Walter Boasso, another Democrat, and John Georges, an independent and New Orleans area businessman, touted their skills that made them successful in the private sector.

Their campaigns have been built on the millions of dollars of their own money they have spent on television commercials.

Bob Mann, former communications director for Gov. Kathleen Blanco and longtime aide to former U.S. Sen. John Breaux, sized up the forum well in comments he made to The Times-Picayune of New Orleans.

"From a civics standpoint, maybe they (Campbell, Boasso and Georges) did what they should do, but from a political standpoint, if you're going to take down the front-runner, you've got to try to engage him and trip him up and smoke him out," Mann said. "In most cases, they didn't even try."

Jindal did what front-runners are supposed to do, according to Mann.

"The way he conducted himself, it was classic front-runner strategy: Don't say anything too controversial. Just take care of your business and get out alive," Mann said. "This (the forum) was a sideshow in the race. The race is being fought on the other television channels with these 30-second spots."

Money is plentiful

Jindal will be able to match the millionaires' TV campaigns, thanks to the \$10 million he has raised from over 21,000 contributors. He still has \$6 million in the bank.

Georges loaned his campaign \$10 million, and he has spent half of that. He has raised \$202,645 in contributions, and has over \$4.2 million in the bank.

Boasso has used about \$4 million of his own money and raised \$215,022 in contributions. He has spent \$3 million and had \$9,227 in the bank at the end of the latest reporting period.

Campbell raised \$178,296 over the last two months and had \$1.14 million in the bank.

He loaned his campaign \$400,000, but paid back an earlier loan of about the same amount.

Sometimes you can tell a lot about a candidate when he tells you how he would manage your tax dollars. The state, for example, is expected to have another \$1 billion surplus from the last fiscal year.

Jindal once again played it safe, saying he wants to see how things look in December before committing. And he took a dig at current officeholders.

"I'm certainly glad (legislators) didn't know they had the money six months ago because they would have spent it if they had," he said.

Campbell said he would use the money to help retire the \$12 billion in state retirement debt and direct some of it to hurricane recovery in New Orleans.

Boasso would spend half on road projects, \$400 million on coastal restoration and \$100 million on retirement debt.

Georges said coastal restoration is his top priority. He would also sell the rest of the state's settlement with tobacco companies to raise more coastal restoration money.

Jindal and Georges have issued the most detailed plans about how they would govern, but you have to wonder whether average voters will have the time or inclination to read and analyze their programs.

"The Georges Plan" is a 26-page book. Jindal has perhaps the most detailed program ever promoted in a Louisiana gubernatorial campaign, but you might have a difficult time finding many people who have read it.

You can find Georges' plan at www.georgesforgovernor.com. The details of Jindal's program are available at www.bobbyjindal.com

Boasso has made insurance reform a key plank in his platform, but he has also talked about health care and education as key issues. Look for his plan at www.governorboasso.org.

Campbell has staked his entire campaign on that oil and gas processing tax that he says will raise \$5.5 billion. He would use that money to eliminate the state's corporate and individual income taxes and use the rest to build roads, restore the coast and finance education reforms.

Get the details at www.fostercampbell.com.

Try third parties

For unbiased election information, try the Council for a Better Louisiana (www.cabl.org) and the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (www.la-par.org). Blueprint Louisiana is also promoting a program at www.blueprintlouisiana.com.

Voters will be bombarded with television commercials over the next three weeks and, if viewed with a critical eye, they could help you learn more about the candidates. However, beware of last-minute attacks that can't be verified.

The American Press will be doing its part to acquaint you with statewide and local candidates and outline their views on issues critical to Louisiana and the places where you live.

If you have the opportunity, ask statewide and local candidates to be specific about why they believe you should support their campaigns. Voters deserve more than high-sounding phrases that say little about how he or she will perform in public office.

This is our opportunity to call the shots.

•
Jim Beam, the retired editor of the American Press, has covered people and politics for more than four decades. Contact him at 494-4025

or jbeam@americanpress.com. For an autographed copy of "Positively Beaming," a hard-bound book of favorite Jim Beam columns, call 494-4051.