

## Post-Mortem Fact Check

The 2008 election season left voters with perceptions that are both bitterly true and comically false. Here's one last dig below the surface.

By [Jeremy Alford](#)  
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*To what extent can truth endure incorporation?"*

" Nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

*'I've always wanted to be in the position [to] just be honest as hell."*

" Former U.S. Sen. John Breaux of Crowley, LA

During the final days of the fall elections, Gov. Bobby Jindal cut back-to-back commercials for fellow Republicans in the shade of the Pentagon Barracks across the street from the State Capitol. One of the spots, produced for state Sen. Bill Cassidy's bid in the Baton Rouge-based Sixth Congressional District, called out Democrats for making attacks that were "over the line." But when the National Republican Campaign Committee lashed out at Democrat Don Cazayoux, the incumbent in the race, for voting to legalize cloning in Louisiana when no such vote ever took place, Jindal was nowhere to be found. Those ads were eventually pulled, but it was proof positive that truth sometimes has a party preference.

In Shreveport's Fourth Congressional District, the animosity in the Republican primary crested when Dr. John Fleming and attorney Jeff Thompson accused frontrunner Chris Gorman of lying about his master in business administration degree from Harvard University. Behind the scenes, political operatives also circulated stories linking one of the candidates to a series of work-related deaths, but the mainstream media in north Louisiana never took the bait.

Meanwhile, in Acadiana's Seventh Congressional District, Democratic state Sen. Don Cravins shot his campaign commercials in a place he hoped voters would equate with honesty and integrity: his hometown church, standing below stained-glass windows and praying inside empty pews with his family. A later ad from Cravins slammed Dr. Charles Boustany, the Republican incumbent, for collecting disability checks, which is true. But Boustany, who suffers from a severe case of arthritis, receives the money from a surgeon's insurance program he paid into for years.

There's no shortage this year of examples of campaigns fudging the truth, candidates speaking in half-truths and political operatives spreading downright nasty lies. With the campaigning all but over, here's a quick look at a few outrageous fibs, misleading headlines and harsh realities from the recent political season:

**Hitting the Pipe?** — When the Southeastern Louisiana University Social Science Department released a poll last week showing GOP state Treasurer John Kennedy trailing incumbent U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, a Democrat, by 19 percentage points, the Kennedy camp was not pleased. Kennedy spokesman Lenny Alcivar told reporters that those responsible for the poll were "smoking crack." Unfortunately for Alcivar, he not only smeared SLU's faculty, but also a handful of students who helped conduct the poll. Everybody who was anybody in the Louisiana Democratic Party immediately demanded an apology.

**Dardenne Violated Federal Law** — By all indications, Secretary of State Jay Dardenne, a Republican, did not violate the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), but a story published recently by *The New York Times* does suggest as much. It cites a voter purge that removed 25,165 names from local rolls between July 23 and Aug. 27. According to the NVRA, there are certain instances where this should not happen within 90 days of congressional races, one of which was held in Louisiana on Oct. 4. In a legislative hearing after the accusation, Dardenne told the House and Governmental Affairs Committee that voter registrars in each parish are acting on their own, based on a 21-day challenge law that allows them to remove voters if they die, get convicted of a felony, move, provide false information or other factors. The Louisiana Democratic Party howled that its adherents were removed at a higher rate than Republicans. Dardenne says that's because there are more Democrats in the state. The New Orleans-based Louisiana Justice Institute, a civil rights group, unearthed names of voters who were removed from local rolls in error. In preparation, the state sent hundreds of paper provisional ballots to the larger parishes so that purged voters who disagree with their removal from the rolls can use them to cast their votes. A panel of election officials will decide after the fact if the votes should count — and in the process these ballots could become the biggest post-election story out there.

**Jindal as Veep** — Earlier this year, Gov. Bobby Jindal said over and over that he was not going to be the running mate of Republican presidential nominee John McCain. He was right. But that doesn't mean Jindal isn't looking toward 2012. Later this month, Jindal will be in Iowa, a must-stop state for presidential contenders. And what is he doing in Iowa, besides raising money? He'll be speaking to the Family Policy Center, the kind of conservative group a Republican needs to succeed on the national level.

**He Won't Make it Past the Primary** — The contest to capture New Orleans' Second Congressional District surprised everyone, especially those living outside the Crescent City. Who would have thought Bill Jefferson would make it this far? It just goes to show that political bosses are alive and well in south Louisiana, and a reliable base can be built up by anyone — even long-term congressmen who hide money in their freezer for no good reason.

**She Was Supposed to Be a Nun** — The final U.S. Senate debate between Kennedy and Landrieu yielded one nugget of insight toward the end, a relic from the Democrat's childhood that probably caught many conservatives by surprise. When asked what she would be doing with her life if she weren't holding elected office, Landrieu, a hardened politician by any standard, said she once considered becoming a full-time Christian minister. "It happened when I was a young girl and it didn't work out," she said.

**Those Silly Amendments** — While most of the state's public policy groups came out with voter guides supporting this year's constitutional amendments, the New Orleans-based Bureau of Governmental Research took a more principled approach and only supported three out of the seven. On one amendment, the bureau simply stated the "issue is too insignificant to warrant a constitutional amendment." Not including the seven proposals slated from this year's ballot, Louisiana voters have considered 214 amendments since the 1974 Constitution was adopted. To date, 151 of those

amendments have been approved. The concept of the constitution as a relatively permanent statement of basic law should always be remembered, says Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council in Baton Rouge, especially since the original fades with the adoption of each new amendment. "In each case, voters should consider not only the merits of the amendment, but also whether the proposed language belongs in the constitution," Brandt says.

The 2008 election season is almost a wrap. There will be at least two more congressional runoffs in December — one in New Orleans and one in Shreveport — and the 2010 U.S. Senate race should start gathering momentum next year. However, Louisiana is entering a downtime in its political cycle as 2009 offers no (scheduled) major elections.

But behind the scenes, the scheming and positioning continues. Meanwhile, what you see is not always what you get in Louisiana politics, as state Sen. Danny Martiny, a Metairie Republican, pointed out in a recent legislative session. "We're not in the reality business," Martiny said, "we're in the perception business."

*Jeremy Alford can be reached at [jeremy@jeremyalford.com](mailto:jeremy@jeremyalford.com).*