

Poll, UNO study at odds on Landrieu re-elect bid

by **Sam Hanna, Jr.** - posted Tuesday, April 15th, 2008 @ 2:38 pm

The political prognosticators who have suggested U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu could be easily unseated in this fall's elections may want to rethink their position.

Or they may be on to something.

That much was evident upon reviewing the results of a poll conducted by Southern Media & Opinion Research, which was released earlier this week.

Southern Media, which is owned by veteran political operator Bemie Pinsonat, conducted its poll March 26-April 9.

Tallying a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent, some 600 likely voters in Louisiana were called to give their views on the pending Senate race between Landrieu and the Republican who is expected to challenge her.

That would be state Treasurer John Kennedy.

In a head-to-head match-up, Southern Media's poll found that 50.0 percent of the respondents said they supported Landrieu to Kennedy's 38.4 percent. Some 11.6 percent were undecided, didn't know who they would vote for or wouldn't disclose their choice in the projected campaign.

The Kennedy in question is the same Kennedy who was a candidate for the Senate four years ago in the election David Vitter won outright in the primary, riding the coattails of a then-popular president, George W. Bush.

Kennedy was a Democrat in those days. He conducted his Senate campaign in 2004 as a liberal, running to the left of a fellow Democrat, then-Congressman Chris John.

Upon returning to the treasurer's office, Kennedy distinguished himself, persistently criticizing then-Gov. Kathleen Blanco. He roasted Blanco for her spending policies as the state's chief executive. Blanco was a spend-thrift, according to Kennedy.

Over time, we have to surmise, Kennedy realized he was more conservative than the image he projected on the campaign trail in '04, switching stripes last year following a meeting or two with the president's chief political advisor at the time, Karl Rove. Other Republicans were involved as well in convincing Kennedy to make the switch to the GOP, including Vitter.

The figures the Southern Media poll produced, though, represent a stark contrast to the picture the state and national Republican parties have painted over the past few months, claiming along the way that Landrieu was the most vulnerable incumbent Democratic senator in the country who will face the electorate this year.

If Landrieu is the most vulnerable Senate Democrat who will stand for re-election in 2008, chances are it's going to be long year for any Republican who vies for a seat in the most exclusive club in the world.

Yet, we cannot overlook the findings of a study conducted by Edward E. Chervenak of the

political science department at the University of New Orleans.

Chervenak's study took a hard look at the changing demographics in the post-Hurricane Katrina era among voters in New Orleans, including the eight parishes that make up the Greater New Orleans region.

"The downsizing of the African-American voting population in Orleans will also shape Louisiana's politics. Blacks in New Orleans have been a bedrock of support for Democratic candidates. For instance, in 2002 & Landrieu won 94 percent in those precincts that contained 75 percent or more registered black voters. While Landrieu won the state by 42,012 votes, she won in the heavily black areas of New Orleans by a margin of 62,912 votes. The Democratic Party's strategy of relying on the support of the black and Democratic areas of New Orleans to carry them to victory in statewide elections is most likely a casualty of Hurricane Katrina. By all appearances it looks as if the storm has wreaked havoc on a sizeable and reliable voting bloc for the Democratic Party in Louisiana," said Chervenak's study.

The study conducted by Chervenak may explain why Southern Media's poll discovered that Sen. John McCain commands a comfortable lead in Louisiana over the Democrat he most likely will face in the presidential campaign later this year.

That Democrat, of course, is Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois.

When pitted against each other, Southern Media found some 50.5 percent of the respondents favored McCain to 35.3 percent for Obama. Slightly more than 14 percent were undecided.

Obviously, those changing demographics in the New Orleans area that Chervenak's study reported affect Obama, an African-American whose racially charged comments are certain to fuel turnout among white voters in Louisiana, especially in the northeastern region of the state.

It's worth noting, though, that Chervenak's work was not a poll. It was study of demographics, which are not likely to change in the near future.

A poll, on the other hand, is a snapshot of the mood of the electorate at a given moment, meaning those findings can change at the drop of a hat.

That brings us back to Landrieu.

The 50-percent support for the two-term senator from New Orleans that Southern Media's poll disclosed is coming from somewhere other than the city.

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Note: Let s use this very early poll to motivate us to get busy on Kennedy s behalf. Landrieu is quite vulnerable and we must take advantage of it. Now. - EWL