

Da Winnas & Da Loozas

By [Clancy DuBos](#)

If someone had been bold enough to predict 18 months ago that voters in this region would opt to consolidate local levee boards and combine the seven New Orleans assessors into one office before the end of 2006, he or she would have been hauled off to a quiet place for a long rest. Go figure.

For all the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, the storm also stirred a profound sense of civic activism across party, ethnic and class lines -- especially in New Orleans. (See "Commentary," p. 7.) Katrina's aftermath also accelerated the gradual but steady decline in the influence of political organizations in New Orleans.

As has become our custom, the aftermath of the election signals a time to take stock of the season's victors and vanquished. Herewith our assessment of Da Winnas and Da Loozas of Campaign 2006, beginning with ...



Photo by Jonathan G. Williams

Bill Jefferson's Progressive Democrats, once the dominant local political organization, barely got the embattled congressman to 30 percent last Tuesday.

restoration and flood protection cause to the nation's capitol will pay huge dividends in the new Congress. Long-established groups played a big role, too, as the Business Council stepped up to the plate with money and other resources at just the right moment in the consolidation fights. These battles proved once and for all that people can and will take charge of our city's future, and woe to politicians who don't recognize that it's a new day.

2. State Republican Leaders -- Despite the GOP's shellacking on the national scene last week, the special statewide elections of Sept. 30 augur well for the party's prospects in

Da Winnas

1. Citizen Activists -- Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans proved that a handful of committed people can still make a difference in a democracy. They weren't alone. The group, which formed around a kitchen table in Uptown New Orleans and quickly grew into a metro-wide, diverse and irresistible force for change, lobbied to get the levee board and assessor amendments on the Sept. 30 and Nov. 7 ballots, respectively, and passed. Meanwhile, Women of the Storm proved that if you want to get something done, put a woman -- or better yet, 100 women -- in charge. Their perseverance and dedication to the mission of taking Louisiana's coastal

next year's regularly scheduled statewide elections. In traditionally Democratic New Orleans, Republican candidates for secretary of state garnered more than 54 percent of the vote on Sept. 30 as GOP candidates captured both statewide offices up for grabs. Looking ahead to the statewide elections in the fall of 2007, Bobby Jindal looks stronger than ever as a candidate for governor -- and Republicans are aiming to capture a majority of Louisiana's state House seats. Odd as it may sound, Louisiana could prove to be one of the few Republican bright spots between now and the 2008 national elections.

3. **Mary Landrieu** -- While the state Democratic party got whacked on Sept. 30, Louisiana's senior U.S. senator got a new lease on life last Tuesday. The Democratic takeover of the U.S. Senate means she will get a subcommittee chairmanship on the all-important Appropriations Committee, and her star on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee likewise will rise. Most of all, Landrieu is perfectly positioned as a moderate (despite what Republicans like to say about her) willing to vote with Republicans when the issue means more money or attention for Louisiana. For the next two years, she'll be the new John Breaux -- the crucial swing vote on big issues. That could help her two years hence when she is sure to face a tough re-election fight.

4. **BOLD** -- The only political group whose fortunes still look bright is the Black Organization for Leadership Development, whose flagship is now state Rep. Karen Carter in the race for Congress against the wounded duck Bill Jefferson. Although BOLD-backed Brian Egana lost his bid for state representative against J. P. Morrell in Gentilly, he took one of the city's most powerful political families to the mat on their home turf.

5. **Art Lovers** -- How often can you vote for art ... for art's sake? Passage of Amendment 5 last Tuesday means that galleries, artists and art lovers will get to see mo' betta art in New Orleans now that art on consignment will no longer be subject to personal property taxes. For poet-lobbyist Charlie Smith, this campaign was a political masterpiece.

Which brings us to ...

Da Loozas

1. **Political Groups** -- Fewer and fewer voters allow themselves to be "delivered" these days, and many of those who were previously inclined to follow the lead of political organizations remain evacuated because of Hurricane Katrina. Even before the storm, local political groups were on the wane -- dating at least as far back as Ray Nagin's victory in the 2002 mayoral election, in which he ran *against* the groups and beat them soundly. The strongest of the remaining organizations, Bill Jefferson's Progressive Democrats, are tethered to the congressman's waning fortunes and barely got him to 30 percent last Tuesday. As citizens become more engaged, the need for organizations to remind them to vote -- and how to vote -- decreases exponentially.

2. **New Orleans Assessors** -- Several of the assessors pulled out all the stops to try to derail the consolidation amendment on last Tuesday's ballot, which makes the lopsided

vote in favor of consolidation that much more of a loss. Going forward, it's going to be interesting to see which of the magnificent seven emerges as the consensus choice to be *the* candidate in 2010 -- and whether someone from outside their circle steps forth to end the dynasties once and for all.

3. Metro Levee Boards -- The case for consolidating New Orleans area levee boards was so strong that they didn't even bother to mount a campaign against it. The Jan. 1 transition date is rapidly approaching, and some issues still need to be resolved between now and then. I can't wait to see who gets nominated for the new regional board, whose members are supposed to possess professional credentials -- not political connections.

4. State Democratic Leaders -- The state party is touting the newfound influence of Sen. Mary Landrieu on Capitol Hill, and that's nice, but Democrats better watch their backsides in 2007. The home front is not looking good for Gov. Kathleen Blanco and other Louisiana Democrats. It's been said that when the rest of the country zigs, Louisiana zags. Democrats lost both statewide special elections on Sept. 30, including the all-important secretary of state's office, which oversees elections.

5. Louisiana's Republican Delegation -- With the Democratic takeover of Congress and the Senate, Louisiana's five congressmen and U.S. Sen. David Vitter get to see what the back bench looks and feels like. Vitter will stick it out for the long haul, but look for some of our GOP congressmen to either retire or consider a run for statewide office next year.

And next year, of course, will give us a whole new batch of winnas and loozas.