



THE VIEW

Issue #48

April 7, 2008

DESOTO COUNTIANS AND DEMOCRATS IN THE FIRST DISTRICT: WE ARE HERE!

BY

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Much has already been written about the outcome of the First Congressional District race to replace former Congressman and current Interim Senator Roger Wicker. It seems that Wicker's 13 year term as First District Congressman had lulled many into believing that the First is a Republican district and that Roger Wicker's hometown of Tupelo is the unofficial "capital" of the district. The results of the April 1 primary runoff elections for the Republican and Democratic parties have shattered those assumptions with more changes inevitably to come.

In the case of the Republicans one might simply say to citizens of Tupelo, Lee County and surroundings, "You have company." That new arrival in the form of the burgeoning DeSoto County population center has a voracious appetite. It has been well documented by now how Southhaven Mayor Greg Davis parlayed the votes of his home county and those of the 4 immediately surrounding counties into a win in the 23 county district. It is not news that DeSoto County has been growing at an astounding rate. The two questions that were clearly answered on Tuesday were whether these new arrivals, many from across the state line in Tennessee, were as yet acclimated to Mississippi politics, and whether they could be motivated to go to the polls and vote in this most Republican County in Mississippi. That they did respond to the call to weigh in for this, up until now obscure corner of Mississippi, is in no small measure attributable to the tenacity of Republican nominee Greg Davis as a campaigner. Davis, a Mississippi State University engineering graduate and Truman Scholar, has served in the Mississippi Legislature, been elected and

reelected as Mayor of Southhaven and now is one major step away from moving to the Congress. In the end, the best punch by the voters in the remaining 18 counties of the district was insufficient to continue the Tupelo/Lee County dominance of the district. Or was it?

Once again, we must borrow the words of a famous television football commentator, "Not so fast my friend." To find a remaining candidate who still identifies by residence with the eastern part of the district, particularly from the Tupelo to Corinth Highway 45 corridor, one simply has to look toward the Democratic Party. Veteran Chancery Clerk Travis Childers from Prentiss County has proven his ability to get votes against a well known opponent with nearly three decades of experience in the Mississippi Legislature. Representative Steve Holland presented Childers with a formidable challenge that Childers met head on. The combination of Childers and Holland outpolled the Republicans in both the first primary and the primary runoff. Two things that will act in Travis Childers' favor are first, that sobering awareness on the part of the voters in the eastern portion of the First District that they have a major rival for influence just over the horizon to the west in the district and secondly Childers popularity in that last identifiable certainty in the Democratic Party base - the county courthouse. Thus the questions are, will those in the eastern part of the district who have now been put on notice by the new power county on the electoral block cross party lines and vote geographically rather than philosophically, and will Travis Childers' county courthouse base serve as a catalyst uniting African-American Democrats with the old "Jamie Whitten Democrats" in sufficient numbers to produce a win. Remember it is being predicted that this may be a general election that shatters all records for voter turnout, particularly if Barack Obama is the Democratic Presidential nominee. A record-breaking African-American turnout in the counties in the western part of the district in counties like Marshall and Tate could offset some of the Davis advantage particularly if there is a lack of enthusiasm for the John McCain lead Republican ticket.

On an additional issue brought to light by the April 1 election, eye brows should be raised over the implications for Congressional and Legislative redistricting which will occur in less than two years following the 2010 Census. Currently, following the reduction of the number of the Mississippi Congressional districts from five to four, each district must contain approximately 710,000 in total population. Assuming a small increase in that number, the growing concentration of population in DeSoto County will inevitably result in a significant reconfiguration of the district to reflect this increased density of population. Such an eventuality would mean a

concentration of power in the area of these Memphis suburbs. While it is a topic for another day, the same can be said for reapportionment and redistricting of the State legislature. Mississippi House and Senate seats must follow the population, and it is clear that the influence of DeSoto County in the Mississippi Legislature will increase substantially. This is a situation that has been addressed in some detail by Democratic Party observer Jere Nash. The big question that will have to wait a while to be answered is will the gravitation of voters in large numbers toward the highly Republican DeSoto County vortex mean more opportunities for a reinvigorated Democratic party in the remaining areas, particularly those in the eastern counties.

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