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Louisiana Politics

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McKeithen 'Available' for V-P

(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE—The Humphrey-McKeithen talks in Baton Rouge Thursday night and yesterday morning centered on broad general politics, including potential vice presidential material and the Louisiana governor's availability in November if events lead to that point.

The governor is certainly available—more so toward a coalition with the vice president, who has been a friend of some years standing.

While McKeithen leans emphatically to Humphrey as opposed to Sen. Robert Kennedy at the Democratic national convention, the governor is not closing any doors.

WHEN KENNEDY called McKeithen some time ago it was about the possibility of District Attorney Jim Garrison serving him a subpoena during a visit to New Orleans (which didn't come off). Whatever discussion there was about potential running mates was at best casual.

It was a little less casual, but still pretty broad, when McKeithen called back to advise Kennedy that Garrison had agreed to leave Kennedy alone. This time the governor talked with Sen. Ted Kennedy and the discussion about running mates and prospects in the South was a little more than casual.

Of course, it is much too early in presidential sweepstakes for any candidate to line up with a running mate—a selection that is not normally made until after the nomination. Nonetheless, there will be a lot of wooing of a lot of prospects between now and convention time and it certainly can't hurt to be wooed.

THE ATTITUDE sometimes expressed by McKeithen that the job seeks the man, not the man the job, is a little overdone. The job seeking is not usually done overtly, but would-be vice presidents have actively sought the post through a variety of campaign methods.

A lot of the talk about McKeithen for vice president is emanating from the governor's office, itself, fired up by willing supporters who are standing by with both cash and energy and would like to see their man go all the way.

There was a lot of love exchanged between Humphrey and McKeithen during the convention address by the vice president Thursday night to the Louisiana AFL-CIO. Humphrey called McKeithen a remarkable governor and the Louisiana chief executive left few superlatives unsaid in his praise of the vice president.

"I can think of no time in history when this nation has cried out with such need for these qualities embodied in this man," McKeithen said.

M'KEITHEN HAS a number of things in his favor for a vice presidential pitch—he's regarded as a Southern moderate, particularly in race relations; he represents a geographical balance to either Humphrey or Kennedy; he's a tremendous speaker when he uncorks without a text; and he has a peculiar talent for making everyone feel they've gotten pretty nearly what they wanted, even if they didn't. He's a proven vote getter.

Likewise, McKeithen has a number of things against his bid. He's not nearly so well-known nationally as are many other prospective candidates. Steps are being planned to improve that national image. Louisiana is small with only 10 electoral votes.

McKeithen's national ambitions may also become a victim of his state support. There are a number of groups who would not like to see him replaced by Lt. Gov. C. C. Aycock, an avowed conservative.

Then there is one other thing, as a perceptive political observer put it: Don't overlook a Humphrey-Kennedy or Kennedy-Humphrey ticket. They are the two most powerful vote getters in the national party. No one would have thought of a Kennedy-Johnson ticket, but it happened.

THERE IS ALSO some irony in the whoop-de-doo over Humphrey in Louisiana, which seems destined to cast its convention ballots for him. Eight years ago when Humphrey was a senator and the darling of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action he would have had a difficult time in Louisiana.

Now he has become the great conservative (as opposed to Kennedy and with apologies to George Wallace) in the eyes of Louisiana politicians.

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ALTHOUGH supporters of a toll road from New Orleans to Shreveport and Monroe feel they have a desirable and needed project, they are faced with a tremendous task of lining up two-thirds legislative approval for a recommended \$356 million bond issue to get it started.

Proponents didn't do themselves any good when they failed to provide traffic survey statistics to back up claims the superhighway would yield something like \$17 million in tolls a year. One could only deduce from the refusal to provide statistical information on traffic count projections that there was something to hide.

It could be the traffic figures will show that a small segment of the proposed superhighway will provide more than its share of the tolls, or that some portions of roadway simply cannot be justified. Whatever the case, both the public and lawmakers, who must consider providing the funds, are entitled to all the information—not just what the proponents wish them to have.

TWO YEARS AGO the toll road was opposed by lawmakers in the north central part of the state. So a fork was added, routing one leg to the Monroe-Ruston area to pick up legislative support. One of the key backers of the new plan privately admits this.

The state would have to put up an estimated \$11 million a year to help finance the proposal over the 37-year span of the bonds.

Lawmakers from other sections of the state will be giving it a hard look before they vote for the bond issue.