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Election Time: LA-2

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Distinctly Catholic

When you go to the RealClearPolitics site, they have a spread sheet that shows all the competitive races. The district designation is rendered in the party that holds the seat currently, and they are put into columns that show how the prognosticators think the race will go this fall. In the Toss-Up column, there are 37 blue, Democrat races, and in the Lean Republican column, there are 26 Democratic districts and only two Republicans. Over on the Likely Dem column there is a single Republican seat, LA-2.

Louisiana's Second Congressional District is the 34th most Democratic district in the country according to the Cook Partisan Voter Index. It is based in New Orleans and is also a majority, African-American district. But, in 2008, the Democrat defending the seat was ten-term Congressman William Jefferson who is most known for having stashed money he had taken in bribes in his freezer. As well, the late August Democratic primary was postponed due to Hurricane Gustav, pushing the primary to the date of the general election and, consequently, pushing the congressional race until early December, more than a month after Obama had won. Still, the race was close, with Republican challenger Ahn Joseph Cao beating the ethically challenged Jefferson, 49.6 percent to 46.8 percent. Cao became the first Vietnamese-American elected to the House and the Republican member least likely to hold his seat for a second term.

This is not for want of trying. Cao's office sends out an email at least once a week announcing his schedule, his introduction of some new measure, meetings with government officials to try and speed federal assistance. LA-2 was the district most affected by Hurricane Katrina, so federal assistance is not a talking point, it is existential. Additionally, Cao was the only Republican to vote for the original health care overhaul bill last autumn. A devoted Catholic and strongly pro-life, as soon as the Stupak Amendment was adopted, Cao fulfilled a promise he had made earlier to negotiators from the USCCB to vote for the bill. When the final measure passed this year, Cao opposed it, citing changes the Senate had

made including what he deemed inadequate language restricting abortion.

Cao has raised more than \$1.4 million for his re-election campaign and has already spent most of it. As of the last FEC filing, he had \$359,106 in the bank. His challenger, state Rep. Cedric Richmond had raised half a million by the end of June and had a quarter of a million on hand, although he has presumably blown through that in his primary victory over another state representative.

It is difficult to see how Cao can win in such a Democratic leaning district, but Cook Political Report rates the race a "Toss-up" given the national mood and Cao's efforts on behalf of his district. But, his initial vote on behalf of health care reform demonstrated a willingness to break from the GOP party line, and in Louisiana, Democrats and Republicans are united in their support for oil and gas interests, opposition to higher energy taxes, and all Louisianans were mostly unimpressed with the Obama administration's performance handling the Gulf Oil spill. There is a sliver of a chance Cao could again pull an upset, and he is probably the only person who could do that. But, odds are that on a grim night for Democrats, LA-2 will be one of the few seats that flips to the Dems.

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