

What of this Senator John Kennedy from Louisiana

By Ed Breen

The first problem with this is that no one named Sen. John Kennedy ought to come from Louisiana and talk Southern. But he does. Second problem is that Sen. John Kennedy from Louisiana who talks Southern is also a Republican and not a very moderate one at that. The other John Kennedy, the one of my youth, was neither.

The upside of this is that he, this Sen. John Kennedy from Louisiana, is one of those people who can slice and dice with words that seem harmless until you think about what he just said. And then you smile, just as you might if you were listening to Mark Twain or Will Rogers.

Twain of course was the master and it's probably good to mention him here because just last week we lost Hal Holbrook, who devoted 70 years of his life to keeping the wit and wisdom of Mark Twain not only alive but right-on dead-center-perfect in slinging his sarcasm at the gasbags of government.

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A MOMENT

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It was he, Mr. Sam Clemens in his altered state as Mark Twain and interpreted by Hal Holbrook who described the Congress of the United States as "that grand benevolent national asylum for the helpless."

"Imagine, if you will," Twain said, "that I am an idiot. Then imagine that I am a Congressman. But, alas, I repeat myself."

He loved to skewer the government and, most especially, the Congress. Consider this one: "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that

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there is no distinctly native criminal class except Congress."

If Twain took bites, Will Rogers, the cowboy from Claremore, Okla., savaged more gently. "I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts," he said.

It was a good many years ago that Mr. Rogers, edgy as if torn from today's Twitter, described that political landscape he saw in front of him:

"A Republican moves slowly," he said. "They are what we call conservatives. A conservative is a man who has plenty of money and doesn't see any reason why he

shouldn't always have plenty of money. A Democrat is a fellow who never had any, but doesn't see any reason why he shouldn't have some."

All of which brings us back to this Sen. John Kennedy from Louisiana and his slightly off-kilter but deliciously wicked way of looking at himself and his colleagues.

"This election in Georgia," he said last month before the explosive runoff for two Senate seats. "This election will be the most important in history but you have nothing to worry about unless you are a taxpayer, parent, gun owner, cop, person of faith or an un-



Sen. John Kennedy

born baby."

Allow for sarcasm. Or is it?

"Americans are thinking there are some good members of Congress, but we can't figure out what they are good for. Others are thinking, how did the morons make it through the birth canal."

Don't you think Mr. Twain and the Senator from Louisiana might have enjoyed one another's company over some bourbon in jelly glasses?

Oh, but he is a true partisan.

"Being lectured by Gov. Cuomo is like a frog calling you ugly," he said last fall.

Or: "When the Portland mayor's IQ gets to 75 he oughta sell . . ."

Or: "Democrats are running around like they found a hair in their biscuit."

And just one more: "It appears that he might do the right thing, but only when supervised and cornered like a rat."

The politics of it all is serious, of course, but it is somehow charming in an old world sort of way to watch this old man from Louisiana, this 70-year-old junior senator who used to be a trial lawyer work his magic with wit and words. Reminds you a bit of Sen. Sam Ervin, the crafty old North Carolina farm boy of Watergate days.

"The president seems to extend executive privilege way out past the atmosphere," he said of Richard Nixon. "What he says is executive privilege is nothing but executive poppycock."

And on the way out, just one more from this John Kennedy from Louisiana:

"Don't never stand between a dog and a fire hydrant."

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