



The Hon. Bobby Jindal

EDITORS' NOTE Bobby Jindal was sworn in as Governor of Louisiana on January 14, 2008. He attended Brown University where he graduated with honors in biology and public policy. Following his graduation, he attended Oxford University in England as a Rhodes Scholar. In 1994, Jindal went to work for McKinsey and Company as a consultant for Fortune 500 companies before entering public service. In 1996, he was appointed Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) and, in 1998, was appointed Executive Director of the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare. At the conclusion of the Commission's work, Jindal was appointed President of the University of Louisiana System. President George W. Bush appointed Jindal to serve as Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2001 and, in that position, he served as the principal policy advisor to the Secretary of Health and Human Services. He resigned from that position in 2003 to return to Louisiana and run for elected office for the first time. In that race,

Conservative Principled Solutions

An Interview with
The Honorable Bobby Jindal, Governor of Louisiana

Jindal went from being a relatively unknown candidate for Governor to receiving the most votes in the primary election and eventually 48 percent of the vote in a runoff. In 2004, he was elected to the United States Congress representing the First District of Louisiana. In Congress, he was elected Freshman Class President and served on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, the House Committee on Homeland Security, and the House Committee on Resources. Jindal also served as Assistant Majority Whip. His noteworthy accomplishments include the passage of legislation to bring significant offshore energy revenues to Louisiana for the first time and legislation that keeps the Federal Emergency Management Agency from taxing certain recovery grants as income.

Louisiana has fared very well economically and many attribute this to your administration's initiatives. Have you been happy with the impact they've had?

When I took over as Governor, one of our biggest challenges was that, for 25 years in a row, we were the only state in the south where more people were leaving the state rather than moving into the state. We lost almost a whole generation due to lack of economic opportunity.

We have since turned that around. For the past six years in a row, we have had more people moving into the state than leaving the state. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in the south; our per capita income is higher than it has ever been before, ranking higher than it has been in at least 80 years; and, compared to the rest of the country, our GDP has grown 50 percent faster than the national economy.

One of the most important indicators is that we have set a record for the number of people working in the state – not only the number of people living in the state who are now earning the highest income, but we have more people working than ever before.

We have been laser-focused on economic growth. The way we have outperformed the national and southern economies is that we have focused on removing obstacles to economic growth.

It started in our first special session with a discussion on ethics reforms. LSU had surveyed business leaders across the country and they said one of the most important things we could do to attract investment was to crack down on

corruption. We adopted some of the country's most aggressive ethics reforms, which took us from being the 44th worst according to the Center for Public Integrity for Legislative Disclosure, to number 1, and from the bottom five to the top five according to the Better Government Association's Integrity Index.

We then had a second special session to get rid of taxes on debt, new equipment, and utilities. We also enacted the largest income tax cut in our state's history. We wanted to invest in businesses and help them grow in our state. I made the commitment that we would not raise taxes as long as I was Governor.

This led to the third initiative, which was cutting government spending: we cut our state budget 29 percent – \$9 billion – and reduced the number of state government jobs by 28,000. As a result, our credit rating has been upgraded six different times by different agencies and it's the highest it has been in decades. We have continued to govern in a fiscally responsible way.

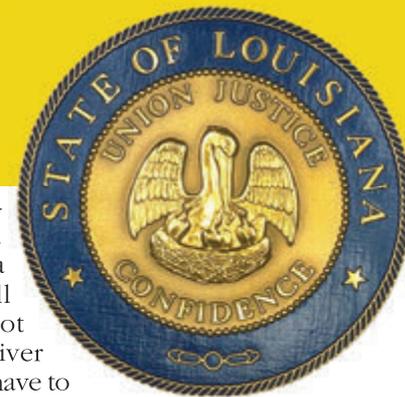
We then knew we needed to provide skilled workers, so we created Louisiana FastStart, which has been a top-rated workforce training program for the past four years in a row. Seventy percent of the companies we surveyed want to move here or expand, but they told us one of their top two concerns is finding skilled workers. So we want to make sure they have the skilled workers ready on the first day.

We also overhauled our educational system with some very ambitious K-12 reforms, from charter schools to scholarship programs.

We have a Day 1 guarantee coming out of community and technical colleges, so our graduates will be ready to work on the first day or we will retrain them for free. We also invested hundreds of millions of dollars in expanding our community and technical colleges to provide those skilled workers.

Finally, we overhauled our healthcare system in the state. The result was economic development wins totaling over 80,000 jobs and over \$50 billion in capital investment.

Despite the national recession, we're working hard to create a predictable, business-friendly environment and new, good-paying jobs in our state. We have done this by a commitment to a predictable regulatory environment, cutting taxes and developing skilled workers. We also enacted some significant reforms to improve our legal system to make it more predictable.



What we have implemented in Louisiana would work elsewhere. If you provide workers with a worker-friendly, economy-friendly, and business-friendly environment, you can create good-paying jobs in the private sector economy.

Many people talk about the challenges in getting people to work together. How were you able to get these changes implemented?

During my first term, we had a democratic majority in both the House and Senate, so we had to work across party lines.

One of the things we have done at the state level that is missing in D.C. is to show that if you're willing, as an elective leader, to use your political capital to push for real reforms, you can get folks to support you across party lines. When you stand on principle, you can get people from both political parties to work with you.

Too often, our leaders in D.C. follow the polls – they try to be all things to all people, and that doesn't work. You have to take on the defenders of the status quo and folks that don't want change to happen. When you do that, people will support you and when they do that, their elected representatives will support you as well.

In D.C., it's not just about Republicans versus Democrats; it's D.C. versus the rest of the country. In D.C., all you hear is what you can't do.

In Louisiana, people wanted big change. In D.C., the same thing is true.

Why does the education system remain broken and is the proper dialogue taking place to reform K-12 more broadly?

It needs to be a priority for our leaders. First, we need to put a great teacher in every classroom. Studies show that students with great teachers earn thousands more on average during their careers.

Yet, most of policies reward teachers based on how long they have been breathing, not how well they are doing in the classroom. We have to turn around our tenure policies and tie them to student achievement. There will be great resistance from the teachers' unions, but we find that good teachers want reforms. Parents also want them and most people understand what is at stake for their children.

The second reform we have adopted is letting the dollar follow the child as opposed to making the child follow the dollar. This reflects the notion that every child learns differently. In New Orleans, 90 percent of our kids go to charter schools. In five years, we doubled the percentage of kids reading and doing math on grade level. Before Hurricane Katrina, over 60 percent of those kids were in failing schools; today, it's less than 6 percent. In 2005, just over half of those kids were graduating and today, it's just over three-quarters.

There is more work to be done, but it shows that great progress can be made in a short period of time. It doesn't mean charter schools are the only answer. Every child learns differently so we should be giving parents more choices.

Some of the most passionate advocates for reforms are the moms. These kids come from families where their improved education is even changing their families – these may be the first kids to continue their education.

Even though the majority of folks will support these reforms, there are very powerful special interest groups that are invested in the status quo and too many political leaders are scared to take on the unions, so the safest thing is for them to do nothing – we need to push them.

If we really believe in the American Dream and equality of opportunity, we have to fight for educational reform. We're seeing other states adopt reforms similar to ours. The most powerful force has to be the parents. But the business community has also been a powerful voice. We should all worry about this if we want to grow our economies, lower our incarceration rates, lower healthcare costs, and lower welfare costs. There is also a moral imperative that America be an aspirational society – we believe every child has the right to grow and pursue his or her dreams, and a big part of that is making sure every child gets a great education.

What have you been able to do in terms of healthcare reform in Louisiana? How critical have the public/private partnerships been in this effort?

There have been two big things we've done in terms of improving healthcare for our people: one is Bayou Health. Hundreds of thousands of people are now in private healthcare plans and have, for the first time, access to coordinated care and preventive care. We save the taxpayers over \$100 million per year but, what's more important is that folks are getting better access to high-quality care.

We have literally reduced the number of days that babies were spending in NICU units across the state by thousands of days. This means so many babies going home on time, at full weight. Not only is that incredibly cost-effective but it is also so important to improving that child's long-term healthcare. If they start out premature, they're much more likely to have complications as young children.

We have also pursued these public/private partnerships. When I was first sworn in as Governor, we were the only state in the country with 10 state-operated charity hospitals. It served a useful role as a safety net, but they were outdated and inefficient. We have modernized these by partnering with the private sector. We have now privatized nine of them through partnerships with the private sector, and we have shut down three in outdated buildings and provided care in more modern private facilities.

In addition to saving the taxpayers over \$100 million, we've also been able to do things like, in Baton Rouge, reduce the 10 days it used to take to get a prescription filled to less than an hour.

Across the state, more services are being provided at a great savings to taxpayers. What's more important is that we're providing much better quality care by partnering with local, not-for-profit,

and private community partners. We've shown a one-size-fits-all approach is not the way to deliver healthcare. We have to approach each community differently and work with local leaders to provide the best healthcare for people.

Would you provide a more in-depth description of the ethics reforms you were able to implement?

We passed a series of some of the toughest laws in the country. For example, we have increased the financial disclosure for elected officials in all branches of government, as well as senior-appointed officials; required more transparency for lobbyists in terms of detailed monthly spending reports that are made available to the public; and we prohibited contracts between state government and legislators and the executive branch leaders. You have to decide who you want to serve, yourself or the public, because you can't do both.

We also got rid of the exceptions and the gift bans – we capped the amount that could be spent on food and beverages; we got rid of the loopholes for free tickets and we created the office of Inspector General so we have a permanent independent inspector general to root out fraud and corruption. We do annual ethics training. We instituted more whistleblower protection.

The idea of all this was to send a strong message to our elected leaders: You're here to serve the public, not yourselves.

I believe public service should be a sacrifice. Part of the problem you see in our states' and nation's capitals is this permanent governing class where people go into politics, they become lobbyists, they go work for the special interests, and they never go home, and they never work under the same rules and laws they provide for everybody else.

Are you optimistic that the Republican party can be unified today?

The real split is between the rest of the country and D.C. There is so much of a split in D.C. that many say it can't be done. Some of that frustration is both with Republican and Democrat leaders who went to D.C. and said they were going to change the political culture and, instead, became change themselves – that's where the real energy is out there. The middle class has been anxious that every generation before us has left more opportunity for our children than we inherited from our parents. This generation is rightfully worried about becoming the first generation that mortgages our children's future. You have more folks with college debt, more struggling to find good-paying jobs, and more kids living with their parents. There is a real hunger for leadership and bold reforms in our nation's capital.

I think there is a hunger for Conservative principled solutions. ●