

[Jindal speaks to economic progress, challenges](#)



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Gov. Bobby Jindal speaks Thursday at the Bastrop Municipal Center as Mayor Betty Alford-Olive (left) and Morehouse Economic Development Corp. CEO Kay King (right) look on.

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Bastrop, La. —

Governor Bobby Jindal was the guest speaker at Thursday's Bastrop-Morehouse Chamber of Commerce luncheon held at the Bastrop Municipal Center.

The governor's 2010 statewide tour, "Building a Better Louisiana for Our Children," includes stops in each parish to highlight the state's progress in the midst of special challenges like the Gulf oil spill.

Jindal noted the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and the hurricanes since then.

"I get asked the same question almost every day, by a national reporter or someone who's not from Louisiana," he said. "They say, 'Governor, can Louisiana survive this? Can Louisiana bounce back from yet another challenge?'"

"Every time I get asked that question, I tell them, 'Absolutely.' We're going to come back from this stronger and better than we were before the hurricanes, before the oil spill.

"What gives me confidence to tell people that? It's not our government in Baton Rouge, it's not our government in Washington D.C. -- it's the great people of this great state."

Jindal cited the response to oil in the coastal wetlands as an example of the “the ingenuity of Louisiana’s people.” The La. National Guard successfully vacuumed oil from the coastal wetlands, and private companies offered industrial pumps and barges to help with the clean-up.

Jindal said federally mandated inspections brought the successful clean-up to a temporary halt.

“There were a thousand times when we met obstacles and red tape and bureaucracy, responding first to Katrina and then to this oil spill. The amazing thing was, Louisiana people came through every single time. They said, ‘This is our home, this is our state, and we’re going to do what it takes to rebuild.’”

Jindal cited a number of facts and figures that show the state’s strong economic momentum. The U.S. Census indicated Louisiana experienced its third straight year of population in-migration from 2008-2009. Among all states in the South, Louisiana has had the best job performance since Jan. 2008. Gallup’s Job Creation Index for 2009 ranked Louisiana third best among all 50 states.

“Over the last two and a half years, among every state in the South, Louisiana has experienced the best job performance,” said Jindal. “For three years in a row, we’ve had people moving into Louisiana more quickly than they’re leaving. We’re finally beginning to turn that corner.”

Jindal said the progress of recent years is the result of four critical steps: Ethics reform, lowering taxes, revamping workforce development and education reform.

“If you want to encourage an activity, don’t tax it. If you want to discourage an activity, tax it. So why in the world would we tax businesses when they want to expand, modernize or borrow to invest in our state?”

“We cut taxes for businesses. We eliminated the sales tax on manufacturing machinery and equipment. We eliminated the franchise tax on corporate debt. We eliminated the sales tax on natural gas and business utilities. And we passed the largest income tax cut in state history.”

Jindal cited CenturyLink, ConAgra Foods Lamb Weston facility, Gardner Denver, Foster Farms and other new or expanding businesses in northeast Louisiana resulting in 3,834 new direct jobs and nearly \$781 million in new capital investment in the region.

“But you know it’s not about numbers. What it’s really about is providing our families an opportunity to pursue their dreams right here.”

Jindal related the story of Jim Bonner, who worked at the International Paper mill for 28 years and was able to find employment at the new ConAgra plant after the mill closed.

“That’s just one story of thousands of people who are choosing to stay in Louisiana. These are not numbers and statistics. It’s people like Jim Bonner, your neighbors and friends.”

Jindal also noted challenges posed to the state by federal policies such as cap and trade and the Obama administration’s moratorium on deepwater drilling. Two oil rigs have left the state as a result of the moratorium.

“Somebody’s going to have to explain to me how sending equipment and jobs to Egypt and the Congo helps our economy and our country. Nobody wants another explosion, more oil in the water -- but we want drilling to be done safely.”

Jindal related a conversation he had with President Obama in which he expressed his concern for the employees and service industries that would be hurt by the moratorium. Jindal said the president told him these people could get a check from British Petroleum and, later, that they could collect unemployment.

“I said, ‘With all due respect Mr. President, our people don’t want a BP check. They don’t want an unemployment check. They want to go back to work.’

“Every time I meet someone, the number one thing I hear is, ‘Governor, we’re not looking for a handout. We just want to go back to work. We want to provide for our families. We’re willing to work hard, and we just want the chance to compete because we know we can compete with anybody in the world.’”

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