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STATE OF LOUISIANA

"I'M ASKING YOU TO ONCE AGAIN BELIEVE IN LOUISIANA."

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## Governor Bobby Jindal's Remarks to the National Press Club

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\*As prepared for delivery

When I first learned you had invited me to come to the Press Club, I was excited at the prospect of being your biggest newsmaker this week.

Then, on Monday morning, I turned on the TV and saw Reverend Wright standing right here in this pulpit. I mean podium.

I'm a little disappointed the cable channels aren't broadcasting live again this morning. Where are satellite trucks?

I have to tell you, I will never be as colorful or interesting as Reverend Wright. So if that's what you came to see, I suggest you get another cup of coffee. In fact, I am less interesting and less colorful than any Louisiana governor you have ever met. I told my staff the very first day I was sworn in that was one of my goals.

Our state has had its share of colorful, quotable, entertaining politicians. In fact, in many elections it seemed that was the only criteria to get elected in Louisiana. You may remember our former Governor Edwin Edwards' slogan..... "Laissez les bon temps Roulez." Let the good times roll.

It made for great copy and funny sound bites.

But the problem was that the good times did NOT roll. At least not for everyone. The good times rolled for the people in power in our government, but they did not roll for most people in our state. "Who you know" became far more important than "what you know."

Last year, during the campaign, I put the challenge to our citizens to roll all of that back. I went to every city, every parish, every wide spot in the road and said "we CAN change, we MUST change, we WILL change."

And our people responded. They gave us an historic victory on the first ballot...no runoff...something that had never been done with the governor's mansion open. Now, we're changing everything except the food. Well, almost everything.

Today, what I'd like to focus on is not so much WHY that historic change happened – I'll leave it to my fellow Louisianan Charlie Cook to analyze that – but instead I'd like to talk about what we have DONE with that opportunity the voters gave us.

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I took office on January 14th along with a brand new legislature...filled with new faces thanks to our term limits law.

Our regularly scheduled legislative session did not begin until April...a full five months after what had been a watershed election. As you know from following Congress...the institutional memory of any group of politicians is not five months long. It might not even be five days long. If you've ever been to a House committee markup, it's not even five minutes long...

So, to keep what the voters said fresh on the minds of everyone in government, I immediately called a special legislative session to deal with our Louisiana ethics laws.

I see the smirks in the crowd. The phrase "Louisiana ethics" had become an oxymoron or a joke depending on one's level of seriousness. And that's why we had to do that FIRST.

We were determined to send a signal to the entire world that it's a new day in Louisiana – and the only way to make that message stick was to fix our broken system of government ethics. You notice that I have now shifted pronouns from I to "we."

That's because the moment I stepped off the stage at our inauguration, this reform movement became a team effort. Our House Speaker, a Republican, Jim Tucker and our Senate President, a Democrat, Joel Chaisson, and I joined together with one objective: We did not agree on every detail, but we quickly ironed out our differences and passed the most sweeping ethics reform plan any state has ever seen.

I know from my time here in Washington that it is a radical idea to share credit, but it would have been wrong for me to come to speak to you here today without the two of them. Please join me in welcoming President Chaisson and Speaker Tucker.

We have a great team that crosses party lines, regional lines and demographic lines in our state.

Now, if at any point in the history of the National Press Club, you'd had a Governor come to this city and say "I'm from Louisiana, the home of the toughest ethics laws in the country"....you would have assumed it was a sarcastic skit at the White House Correspondent's dinner.

But this time, it's not a parody. We did it. And that's not all. We didn't just pass tough disclosure for legislators, we have tough disclosure rules for lobbyists too. Now can you imagine if every lobbyist in Washington had to disclose his income?

In this first special session on ethics reform, we passed legislation that now requires disclosure at every level of government in our state. In fact, our legislative disclosure form skyrocketed from being ranked in the bottom in the country – NUMBER 43 – to NUMBER ONE – knocking Washington State out of first place, virtually overnight.

And that's not all. In our ethics reform special session, we prohibited contracts between state government and legislators and executive branch leaders – forcing officials to make a choice – you either work for yourself OR you work for the people of Louisiana, but you cannot do both.

We prohibited statewide elected officials, the governor's senior staff, legislators, their spouses, and businesses from receiving recovery-related contracts.

We dramatically increased lobbyists' reporting requirements. Under these reforms, lobbyists in Louisiana are now required to disclose their compensation, the subject matter they are lobbying on, and their business relationships with statewide elected officials, executive department heads, legislators, and their spouses.

And we didn't stop there. We eliminated free tickets for elected officials to attend professional and collegiate sporting events, hunting and fishing trips, and golf outings.

We put an end to the lavish wining and dining of our legislators and public servants by lobbyists

– capping all food and beverages for public servants.

We also opened up the vast majority of state contracting and legislating to immediate public view on the internet. State government is now required to post monthly reports of appropriations and spending for each budget unit of state government – including every agency and function – on a user-friendly website that will be up and running by the beginning of next year.

Who you know is now NOT more important than what you know in Louisiana.

That's what the people of our state deserve. And it's what our business prospects deserve. Nothing less.

And that is the driving force behind every move we have made – making sure Louisiana can compete in the new global economy.

At one time, our state WAS the commercial envy of the entire nation.

Thomas Jefferson once said that “the position of New Orleans certainly destines it to be the greatest city the world has ever seen.”

And in the decades after the Louisiana Purchase, it WAS.

Our banks were larger than New York's.

Our port was larger than Philadelphia's.

Our population dwarfed St. Louis and Chicago and every other city west of the Allegheny Mountains.

New Orleans was the place people came from all over the world to make their fortune.

If you had a good idea and a willingness to work hard and take a risk, New Orleans welcomed you with open arms. That approach made us the Silicon Valley of the 1800s.

My partners and I are here today to tell you that Louisiana will be the center of commerce and innovation again in this country. The Silicon Valley of the next century.

One of our state's greatest home grown historians Joseph Tregle wrote that in Louisiana, the past and the present have always lived side by side. Dr. Tregle passed away two years ago, but if he was with us today, I think he would right an amendment to that...and say that while the past and present have always lived side by side, the future has moved in just next door.

And with our resources...from agriculture to transportation to petroleum...we can be at the center of innovation and commerce in this country again.

If you have a solution to the impending problems with the world's food supply? Come to Louisiana, where the growing cycle lasts most of the year.

If you have a way to stretch our domestic oil supply and decrease our dependence on foreign oil? Come to Louisiana, where one third of the nation's oil and gas comes in off our coasts.

If you have a product to export to the nation and the world, come to Louisiana, where we have five of America's largest ports, and three of the nation's major railroads.

Louisiana has always been perfectly situated to be the capital of American innovation...if only Government would get out of the way.

And we are doing just that, right before your eyes.

Our first task was ethics – we now have a predictable playing field for outside investors. You won't get beat by a rigged game. After that, we moved to dramatically alter our tax code.

In a second special session in March, we ELIMINATED anti-business taxes on business utilities, new equipment and debt.

We sped up the elimination of the tax on business investment – meaning Louisiana is no longer one of only THREE states in the country that taxes manufacturing machinery and equipment.

We accelerated the elimination of the tax on capital investment – meaning Louisiana is no longer one of the ONLY states in the country that taxes business debt.

We completely eliminated the “penny” tax on business utilities.

And – we re-authorized Louisiana's New Market Tax Credits to encourage further investment in our state, and especially those areas that are still working to rebuild from the storms of 2005.

We also did something government too rarely does...we used a one-time surplus to make one-time expenditures that strengthen our economy. Thanks to the price of oil and the pace of reconstruction, our state budget is actually doing pretty well.

More sober governors might have created big new programs...setting a higher baseline for spending that might not be sustainable once revenues take a dip.

We did just the opposite.

We invested hundreds of millions of dollars in economic development... on priorities like roads, bridges, ports, and coastal restoration.

And we made common-sense reforms by dedicating those transportation taxes and fees we already pay to our transportation priorities.

We also acted as responsible stewards of taxpayer money and assisted future generations of Louisianians by paying down some of our debt to teachers and state employees, and by investing in the maintenance and upkeep of our educational institutions.

Long range planning.....another sure sign that things HAVE changed.

Now that we're in regular legislative session...we have moved to workforce development. It's not sexy...it doesn't make for good sound bites on the news....but it makes a big difference in trying to recruit new companies to our state.

Like a lot of states, our workforce training programs were designed around the government offering the training instead of the employers hiring the trainees.

That's why today we actually have people who need jobs AND jobs we can't fill.

In today's fast-paced economy, that situation cannot be allowed to stand.

We currently have nearly 100,000 job opportunities across our state: Thousands of jobs, and many in the growing industries of transportation, healthcare, manufacturing, and construction.

While our state's unemployment rate is at its lowest point in 30 years, thousands of Louisianians are still outside the labor force entirely.

The numbers are clear: 84 percent of the job opportunities in Louisiana require a two-year degree or less, yet only 12 percent of our high school graduates receive an associate's degree.

This challenge presents a unique opportunity – and it is currently my top priority - to completely overhaul the workforce development system in our state.

First, we must prioritize our community and technical programs to meet the demands of employers.

I want to be clear: Government cannot, and should not, work alone to accomplish this goal.

We are working to partner with the business community, high schools, technical schools, and local communities to be as effective as possible in training our workers.

Second, we are issuing a guarantee to Louisiana employers – a DAY ONE GUARANTEE that says when businesses hire a graduate from one of our technical colleges they will be ready to work on their very first day on the job or we will retrain them for free.

Third, we are changing our higher education funding formula to reward high-demand, high-cost programs. Right now, Louisiana technical colleges make money training nail technicians, and they lose money by training the nurses and welders our communities need.

Fourth, we are establishing the “Louisiana Fast Start Program” so we can quickly respond to workforce opportunities and challenges in the state.

Fifth, we are REPLACING the existing Department of Labor – and moving the state toward a business-minded approach to workforce programs, driven by the needs of local employers and away from a bureaucratic system.

It's time to put businesses and workers – not government bureaucrats - in the driver's seat.

These are the overarching themes of our comprehensive plan to overhaul the workforce development system in Louisiana. But – each one of these policy details and parts of our agenda have the same goal: to make Louisiana the best place in the nation to raise a family, get a high-paying job and pursue a rewarding career.

I'm sure the business school faculty at LSU could come up with a five-dollar word to brand that philosophy....but I think Larry the Cable guy might have them beat. You know what he says....“Get ‘er done.”

We're going to get it done in Louisiana. No matter how boring that makes my exhibit in the state museum.

If I go down in history for being the most boring governor of Louisiana who made historic reforms in our state - that is a legacy worth having. Even if it doesn't get Hollywood to make a motion-picture film about my time in office...

Thank you for having me.

I hope you will come back to NEW Orleans and our NEW Louisiana real soon.

##END##

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