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Governor likened to 'Maharajah'

By **WILL SENTELL***Advocate Capitol News Bureau*Published: Jul 22, 2008 - **UPDATED: 12:05 a.m.**
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Gov. Bobby Jindal, whose parents are from India, said Monday he took no offense at criticism from a Baton Rouge state senator who accused Jindal of seeing himself as “Louisiana’s all-powerful Maharajah.”

State Sen. Yvonne Dorsey, D-Baton Rouge, made the comment in a three-page letter to colleagues last week after Jindal vetoed \$16 million in legislative pet projects promoted by Dorsey and others.

“I will not confirm Jindal’s grandiose self-opinion that he is Louisiana’s all-powerful Maharajah instead of being merely one more one-term governor,” Dorsey wrote.

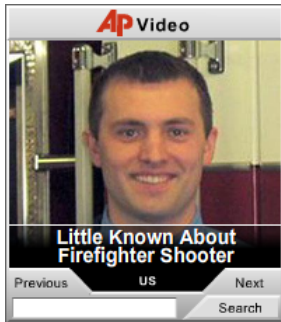
Maharajah is defined in Webster’s New World College Dictionary as meaning great king, with historical links to India.

Jindal said Monday he has not seen the comment. He said he knew the vetoes would trigger criticism.

Asked if he found Dorsey’s comments offensive, Jindal said he would not take any criticism personally.

“We had a policy disagreement,” he said.





“It is not personal,” Jindal said of his vetoes. “It is just about safeguarding the taxpayers’ dollars.”

Jindal is the son of parents who left India six months before his birth in Baton Rouge, where he also grew up.

The use of state funds for high school alumni associations, hot air balloon festivals and churches has triggered controversy for years.

Jindal and other critics contend the spending amounts to slush funds. Dorsey and other lawmakers argue that the money goes for worthwhile projects that badly need state aid.

Dorsey said on Monday that her choice of terms “has absolutely no negative connotation.

“It is the equivalent of me being called a Nubian queen,” she said, a reference to an ancient kingdom in Africa.

After Jindal issued his vetoes, Dorsey called him “asinine” and a “blatant liar.”

However, despite her hopes for a legislative session to try to override some of the vetoes, 36 of 38 sitting senators voted Friday to cancel the gathering.

State Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston and, like Dorsey, a member of the Legislative Black Caucus, said he shared some of Dorsey’s sentiments about the vetoes, but questioned her choice of words.

“I don’t know that I would use that terminology,” Gallot said.

Asked if he viewed the comments as a slap at Jindal’s Indian ancestry he said, “I certainly wouldn’t want to speculate what she meant by it.

“I think the one thing we certainly must do is maintain a level of respect and civility,” he said.

However, Gallot said he was disappointed “that this governor chose (school) vouchers in New Orleans over boys and girls’ clubs in Claiborne Parish.”

The Legislature approved Jindal’s plan to spend \$10 million so that up to 1,500 public school students in New Orleans can attend private or parochial schools.

Senate President Pro Tem Sharon Broome, D-Baton Rouge, said she was not offended by Dorsey’s comments “because I don’t think that was the substance of her letter.”

Broome added later, “I don’t condone, bottom line, any racial slur. I want to make that clear.”

State Rep. Juan LaFonta, D-New Orleans and former chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, said that in light of Jindal’s vetoes of funds for children and senior citizens “it is all fair game.”

“I don’t know what else to tell you,” LaFonta said when asked about Dorsey’s comments.

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