



## Mixed Signals

If Gov. Jindal continues down this path of unwillingness to negotiate on higher ed cuts, he will leave little doubt about his priorities.

By Leslie Turk

Wednesday, June 03, 2009

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"What is the matter with Jindal?" That's the question former English teacher Elizabeth Deerman wrote on *The Independent Weekly's* Web site Sunday night. Deerman, who like most educators across the state, just cannot imagine how Gov. Bobby Jindal can justify the \$219 million he wants to slash from higher education.

We all understand that we're in unprecedented, difficult times and sacrifices must be made in higher education. But if we can throw \$50 million out to save a chicken plant in north Louisiana, aren't we in a position to protect our colleges and universities?

"Investing in education instead of cutting funding for education is the wisest thing we can do for the economy of this state," Deerman writes. "The untapped talent and brilliant minds that are in our youth is astounding. Providing more educational opportunities to develop these minds would bring progress to our state and to our people."

Deerman understands everyone suffers during times of economic crisis. Her message about the critical importance of education at this juncture, however, is not resonating with our governor — who less than two years ago ran on a staunch education platform, often reminding voters that Louisiana's most important resource is not its oil reserves but its people. He incessantly talked of higher education's importance to economic development, saying he would continue the momentum that had taken years to create after the oil bust. He said Louisiana could not be competitive if our best and brightest left us.

That was then.

Jindal is now seemingly content with taking the state back into that hole many of us thought we would never return to. Even his staunchest supporters are finding him to be a governor averse to alternatives plans — despite the tireless efforts of so many to lessen the blow and give higher education officials time to develop and implement additional cost-cutting measures.

Blueprint Louisiana member **Jimmy Maurin** last week made one of the strongest arguments for killing the proposed cuts to higher education. "Don't cut higher education so much that you gut it and lose it and set education back 20 years," *The Advocate* quoted **Maurin** saying. The **Stirling Properties** chairman was appearing before the Senate Finance Committee as part of a group of business leaders asking the Legislature to explore all options outside of cutting higher education.

Legislators like state Rep. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat from Amite, understand **Maurin's** frustration. More than a month ago, Edwards — after meeting with a number of higher ed reps — took a plan to use the rainy day fund (formally called the Budget Stabilization Fund) to three of Jindal's top staffers in separate discussions. The plan for a temporary fix included the possibility of using \$98 million from approved college construction projects to backfill the fund, and Edwards was optimistic when he made his first pitch to Jindal's team; his goal was for a worst-case scenario to be half the proposed \$219 million in cuts. He was taken aback when all three rejected the plan outright. "I think they even called it a gimmick," he recalls.

Edwards maintains that the fund was created to stabilize the budget and can only be used when revenues for the next fiscal year are projected to be lower than the current fiscal year — which is the situation we're facing. "I don't know how it's a gimmick when you use it for its stated purpose," he says. "For the governor to come out and say he opposes using that fund for what it was created for is mind-boggling."

And while Jindal remains adamant that he will not delay any tax cuts, last week he sounded a tad more willing to put \$50 million in tax amnesty money into the rainy day fund and then pull it out for higher education. It's a glimmer of hope. But we can do better.

We should all join forces to urge the governor to push rainy day monies into higher education, and consider delaying tax cuts to cushion the blow. The colleges and universities have already promised to do their part, increasing tuition, slashing programs and eliminating duplication. The governor needs to step up and do his.

Deerman, who lives in Lafayette, taught English for 30 years at Sunset High School. "I'm disillusioned with him," she says of the governor. "There was supposed to be an emphasis on education, but now all he wants to do is cut."



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Many education, business and legislative leaders believe if Jindal continues down this path of unwillingness to negotiate on these cuts, he will leave little doubt about his priorities — and will make crystal clear his posturing for higher office at a time when Louisiana desperately needs his leadership. Deerman has already made up her mind. “That’s what he’s trying to do,” she insists, “make himself look good to the rest of the [nation’s] Republicans.”

Leslie Turk

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written by bigearl , June 03, 2009

A wolf in sheep's clothes... I've thought this about Jindal for years.

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written by justwandering , June 03, 2009

Its time to re-structure and re-organize higher ed. Four different university systems, four different boards supervising these systems, too many four year colleges and universities, growing out-of-control community college system, etc. Now is the perfect time to eliminate the redundancy and create an effective and efficient system. Funding is not the problem, per capita, I suspect funding is comparable to or greater than other states. Its the inefficiencies.Can't keep throwing money into a broken system and expect improvement.

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written by twiggy , June 03, 2009

If I remember correctly our own state constitution protects certain areas of the state budget from being cut. About the only areas that can be cut are tourism and education. Do you remember Edwin Edwards shutting down state visitor centers and certain state run tourism attractions? If you look back far enough the same thing has happened over and over in the state of Louisiana - this is nothing new - the only thing new is a different Governor. We are directing anger at an individual when our own system is the problem.

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