



Reform effort is on the way

By **CARL REDMAN**

Advocate Executive Editor

Published: Dec 2, 2007 - Page: 9B

U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal was elected Louisiana governor on promises to bring sweeping reform to state government.

As governor-elect he has enlisted advocates for change to help develop his legislative package.

But delivering on those promises is not a done deal.

Jindal was not handed a mandate for change. More than half of the state's voters stayed home on election day, and 46 percent of those who turned out voted for someone other than Jindal.

In addition, reform governors don't have a great track record in Louisiana.

Consider Buddy Roemer, who took office in 1988 promising a "revolution."

By the time he lost his re-election bid, Roemer had become largely ineffective.

Roemer's legacy includes the birth of state's gambling industry and a transportation construction program that has yet to be completed nearly 20 years after its inception.

Louisiana has been resistant to change, particularly when the governor pushing the change is confined to a single four-year term.

Early this year, MDC Inc., a public policy think tank in North Carolina, released its latest "State of the South" report. The 2007 installment focuses on the role of philanthropic groups as catalysts for change.

While philanthropy normally carries a connotation of charitable giving, the MDC report outlines another important function — spotlighting public policy issues and promoting ways to address them.

Although not as publicly accountable as government agencies, organizations outside government can provide continuity that spans election cycles and political administrations.

Jindal's dash to the governor's mansion overshadowed significant activity on the philanthropic front in Louisiana.

The League of Women Voters continued its efforts to educate voters on issues and candidates. The Baton Rouge Area Chamber waded into the mix last year with an ethics reform legislative agenda.

Two respected public-policy groups — the Council for A Better Louisiana and the Public Affairs Research Council — seem to have stepped up their efforts to promote change.

CABL's "Quantum Change" agenda this year focused attention on how far Louisiana lags other states in areas such as education and economic growth and pushed candidates to take positions that would help the state close the gap.

A new group, Blueprint Louisiana, was created this election cycle by civic and business leaders from across the state to push change that includes improving ethics laws, education, health care delivery and transportation.

Blueprint Louisiana pressed political candidates to sign onto its agenda and last week touted having a "super majority" of pledge-takers elected to the Legislature: 32 of 39 senators and 73 of 105 House members.

While he didn't take the Blueprint pledge, Jindal is pushing for broad-based assistance in coming up with details for a change agenda that touches on most of the points in the CABL and Blueprint agendas.

For example, when Jindal created a task force to help shape the agenda for an anticipated special session on ethics early in 2008, he enlisted two civic leaders to coordinate that group's activity: Sean Reilly of Baton Rouge and Virginia Shehee of Shreveport.

Both are on the Blueprint steering committee.

By tapping Reilly and Shehee, Jindal linked his ethics agenda in whatever form it takes to the Blueprint agenda.

The Blueprint Louisiana ethics agenda includes financial disclosure for legislators and statewide officials, increasing regulation of lobbyists and better ethics enforcement.

Jindal has other transition task forces that have tapped business and civic leaders from across the state, enlisting many key players in the CABL, PAR and Blueprint groups.

By making them part of his team, Jindal not only gets the benefit of their ideas and expertise, he also may have them as allies when he takes his agenda to the Legislature.

But such linkages have a potential downside for the groups pushing change.

If groups such as CABL and Blueprint become too closely linked to Jindal, public support for their agendas could be compromised if Jindal falls from public favor.

They would then have a more-difficult time promoting change that spans political administrations.