



Our Secretive Governor

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As a candidate, Gov. Bobby Jindal advocated open government, but his record in office shows him to be an enemy of governmental sunshine. In his first two years as governor, Jindal pushed bills that significantly expanded the list of records in the executive branch that can be kept secret. At the same time, he has used the vast powers of his position to quash legislative efforts to open his office and his records to public scrutiny. Most galling of all, he continues to boast that he supports "transparency" in government. Such claims are bogus, and it's time for lawmakers to pull back the curtain and let the sun shine on our secretive governor.

Lawmakers in a Senate committee this week will consider a bill that could reverse the disturbing trend ushered in by Jindal. The Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee will take up Senate Bill 593 by Sen. Robert Adley, R-Benton, on Wednesday, May 26. Early next month, House Bill 307 by Rep. Wayne Waddell, R-Shreveport, should come before the House and Governmental Affairs Committee. Both bills would, in the words of the nonprofit government watchdog agency Public Affairs Research Council (PAR), "create a more open and transparent governor's office." We urge committee members on both panels to approve the bills.

Even before Jindal acted to cloak his own office and others under his purview in a shroud of secrecy, the governor's office of Louisiana was widely considered one of the least "open" in the country.

In the wake of changes rammed through by Jindal, his office was ranked "dead last" in openness by the University of Florida's Citizen Access Project. Despite independent verification of Jindal's antipathy toward transparency — particularly as applied to himself — he continues to spout the Orwellian line that his changes in 2008 and 2009 "have opened up more records in the Governor's Office than have ever been opened before."

Wrong.

To fully appreciate how much damage Jindal has done to open government, it's necessary to examine in detail the records he continues to hide from the people. According to PAR, those include:

- Records relating to the "deliberative process," a vaguely defined concept that includes any record used to help the governor make a decision or set policy.

- Records regarding "pre-decisional advice and recommendations to the governor" concerning the state budget, no matter which part of the executive branch holds them. Records subject to this exception become public after six months — but by then the budget has long since been adopted.

- Communications with internal staff, defined as the governor's chief of staff, executive counsel and director of policy *and employees under their supervision*.

House Bill 307 and Senate Bill 593 put budget-related records back in the public eye but still provide limited exceptions for records relating to "pre-decisional decision making." Both bills also tighten exceptions that apply to other state agencies and employees. PAR notes that "some limited records exceptions for the governor may be in order," but Jindal's exceptions are "overly broad and should be corrected this session before citizen confidence in government is further eroded."

"Transparency for the executive branch of government is critical. It is the fabric that holds our government accountable," Adley recently told the Baton Rouge Press Club. He added, "What is it that creates a breeding ground for corruption? Secrecy."

We couldn't agree more. We hope lawmakers will act soon to make Jindal a man of his word on the subject of transparency.