

## Our Views for January 31, 2010

### Playing host to secrecy

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Gov. Bobby Jindal entered office promising greater transparency in state government, but his actions often suggest a love of secrecy, not openness. That's bad news for a state that desperately needs more accountability for its elected officials.

A case in point is Jindal's recent refusal to release the names of his guests to watch the postseason contests of the New Orleans Saints.

The Advocate filed a public records request asking the governor to identify the guests who used his suite in the Louisiana Superdome to watch the Jan. 16 playoff game and who joined him on Jan. 24 for the National Football Conference Championship Game.

In response to The Advocate's request, Jindal's executive counsel's office provided copies of five e-mails from people seeking entry to the suite for themselves and others.

In only one instance do the e-mails suggest that entry was gained — an e-mail from state Rep. Gordon Dove, R-Houma, thanking Jindal for "allowing me to be 'in that number.' "

Jindal's press secretary, Kyle Plotkin, said Jindal's office does not maintain a list of who got cleared to enter the governor's suite.

The governor's suite would be a coveted spot for most football fans, and it's been a particularly desirable spot during a football season in which the Saints drew heavy interest with their ascendance to the Super Bowl. We are sure there are many requests for admittance to the suite, and we find it difficult to believe there is not a list of who is invited in.

The governor's suite is a public asset that any governor can use to reward political friends and make new ones. Jindal, whose frequent fundraising trips outside the state have raised speculation that he might have presidential aspirations, should invite an even greater degree of scrutiny about his political and social associations.

Jindal's refusal to disclose the names of those who have used this public asset for sporting events suggests a view of his governorship as a private fiefdom, not a public trust.

Such attitudes, of course, are part of a long tradition among many Louisiana governors. Jindal's predecessor, Kathleen Blanco, refused in January 2008 to identify who watched the LSU national championship game from the governor's suite.

We didn't like this kind of secrecy when Blanco did it, and our position hasn't changed. We oppose this kind of secrecy regardless of who is governor

Jindal promised a political break with the old ways when he was inaugurated. Instead, as in this instance, he's often given us politics as usual.

Jim Brandt, who heads a state government watchdog group, the Public Affairs Research Council, said he was disappointed by Jindal's response to The Advocate's request. He said he saw no reason why the information on use of the governor's Superdome suite shouldn't be released.

"It's a legitimate request for information," said Brandt.

We're disappointed by Jindal's response, but not surprised. This is a governor, after all, whose staff successfully lobbied for changes to the state's public records law that shield more records from public view.

This isn't the way to move Louisiana forward.