



In and out

By Jeremy Alford (Contact)

Monday, July 26, 2010

Two years ago, it wasn't unusual to hear political oddsmakers predicting that Gov. Bobby Jindal might be the first major departure from his own administration.

There was some early chatter about Jindal filling the vice president spot on the Republican presidential ticket, and then there were mumblings about a possible bid for the U.S. Senate. All along, though, Jindal said he was staying put. And he has.

The same thing, however, cannot be said about the rest of his cabinet and inner staff.

On his first full day in office, Jindal held a cabinet meeting with all of his department secretaries. They also held a joint news conference from the front steps of the Governor's Mansion, and the image was captured in print, online and over the airwaves. Today, the resulting photographs seem much older than 30 months, chiefly because so many of the faces are no longer there.

Technically, there are 14 positions in Jindal's cabinet; six have been vacated since January 2008, including the secretaries of environmental quality, labor, social services and transportation. Commissioner of Administration Angele Davis and Health Secretary Alan Levine are the latest to leave; both are scheduled to work their final days in August.

So far, there have been another eight exits from Jindal's executive staff, including the director of intergovernmental affairs, director of community programs, two different executive counsels, an ethics administrator, legislative liaison and highway safety director. Most recently, Chief of Staff Timmy Teepell announced he's taking a three-month leave in August to help other Republican governors navigate the approaching election cycle.

That's more than a dozen inner-sanctum departures in just two-and-a-half years, a figure that approaches what two-term governors experience at some point during their encore. Joshua Stockley, a political science professor at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, says Jindal's approval ratings, which hover around the mid 70s, have probably helped deter concerns that might plague an unpopular governor.

In other words, Jindal's success in retail politics grants him carte blanche in staffing decisions. "One of the reasons we don't see more attention being given to these resignations is because voters overwhelmingly approve of the job the governor is doing," he

says. "He's very popular and is experiencing a bit of a public relations bump, from this [Deepwater Horizon] disaster. Most people aren't even noticing the resignations."

Teepell's temporary departure speaks more to his reputation as Jindal's chief political architect, but the resignations of Davis and Levine are made of something deeper. All three, however, were announced in early July, just as Jindal had painfully buried a \$1 billion budget shortfall and started work on solving a subsequent \$2 billion deficit.

That an offshore oil rig exploded, causing one of Louisiana's worst ecological disasters, and was followed by a federal moratorium on certain offshore drilling activities, doesn't help the forecast.

Regarding Davis and Levine, there's not a lot of scuttlebutt floating around. The draw of the private sector, to be certain, can serve as a contributing factor, but there's also the obvious. "Who wants to preside over the demise of an economy?" one longtime lobbyist asks. "You won't have a career after it's done. There's no telling how big the shortfall is going to be now after the oil, Avondale closing down and whatever comes next."

Turnover, without a doubt, can cause some serious administrative problems, not limited to continuity. But Jim Brandt, executive director of the Public Affairs Research Council, says there haven't been many hiccups for Jindal.

There are many signs that the Jindal administration plans for resignations—when possible—maybe weeks before any public announcement is made, Brandt says. For example, Jindal had a replacement lined up for Levine almost immediately after his resignation was announced. Bruce Greenstein, formerly the managing director of health care technology for Microsoft, was on deck.

The Jindal administration also is a big believer of promoting from within, to the point that it's almost dizzying.

When Jindal's former executive counsel Jimmy Faircloth resigned in July 2009, he was replaced by Labor Secretary Tim Barfield. When Barfield left in December 2009, Stephen Waguespack gave up being deputy chief of staff to take over. Former Louisiana Recovery Authority Director Paul Rainwater then relinquished his gig to become deputy chief of staff. Now that Davis and Teepell are leaving, Rainwater will become the commissioner of administration and Waguespack the chief of staff.

Similar scenarios played out when Jindal filled the top spots at the departments of transportation and social services. Even for his legislative liaison, Jindal plucked Scott Angelle from his secretarial duties at the Department of Natural Resources and also later appointed him interim lieutenant governor when Mitch Landrieu was elected mayor of New Orleans earlier this year. "There really has been a lot of change at the top," Brandt says. "But I don't sense that there's been any major problems. They always seem to have a plan and have adapted well. It's obviously been all thought out."

There are a variety of reasons Jindal has lost secretaries. In some instances, sacrificial lambs were needed. After complications with assistance programs in the wake of Hurricane Gustav, Department of Social Services Secretary Ann Williamson resigned amid criticism from higher-ups. William Ankner, who resigned from his post as secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development earlier this year, is rumored to have had

little choice in the matter. That was after DOTD came under fire for awarding a controversial \$60 million contract to widen Interstate 10 in East Baton Rouge Parish to the highest bidder.

And who could forget Jim Champagne, who had served as the executive director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission for 12 years before Jindal gave him the boot? In March 2008, Champagne disagreed with Jindal's plan to repeal the state's motorcycle helmet law; he was promptly shown the door.

Then there's politics. Some folks became free agents because they wanted their own share of the action. Former Office of Community Programs Director Natalie Robottom quit earlier this year; she has since been elected president of St. John the Baptist Parish. When he retired in January, former Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Harold Leggett commented that he wouldn't mind being a member of the Legislature. Faircloth also stepped down to face voters, making an unsuccessful bid for the Louisiana Supreme Court.

As for Jindal, after all of the national political hype, one terrible hurricane season and now an insufferable economic and ecological crisis, he's still here. Many of his underlings, however, are not.

Stockley wonders why administration changes don't happen more often. "We all forget how extremely stressful and demanding these cabinet jobs can be," he says. "It's not really amenable to a long and healthy career."

GOING, GOING, GONE

Here is a list of staff and cabinet members who have left the Jindal administration since 2008:

Alan Levine, Secretary, Department of Health and Hospitals *Aug. 2010*

Timmy Teepell, Chief of staff *Aug. 2010* (on three-month leave)

Angele Davis, Commissioner of Administration *Aug. 2010*

William Ankner, Secretary, Department of Transportation and Development *Feb. 2010*

Luke Letlow, Special assistant/Director of intergovernmental affairs *Feb. 2010*

Natalie Robottom, Director, Governor's Office of Community Programs *Jan. 2010*

Harold Leggett, Secretary, Department of Environmental Quality *Jan. 2010*

Tim Barfield, Secretary, Louisiana Workforce Commission *Dec. 2009*

Jimmy Faircloth, Executive counsel *June 2009*

Ann Williamson, Secretary, Department of Social Services *Sept. 2008*

Richard Sherburne, Administrator, Louisiana Ethics Board *June 2008*

Tommy Williams, Legislative liaison *June 2008*

Jim Champagne, Executive director, Louisiana Highway Safety Commission *March 2008*

SOURCE: Staff research