

Jindal's vetoes of 'hot-button issues' altering his image

But number of bills killed pales to Treen's

Friday, July 18, 2008
By Ed Anderson

BATON ROUGE -- Although Gov. Bobby Jindal ended his first general and two special legislative by vetoing 29 bills and more than \$30 million in three separate budgets, his first-year total is a far cry from the 83 bills former Gov. David Treen spiked in the 1981 regular session, according to legislative records.

Treen, a fiscal conservative and the first Republican elected governor after Reconstruction, battled with more liberally spending Democrats during his single term in office. In his four-year term, Treen vetoed 222 bills, not counting line items struck from state budget bills.

Barry Erwin, president of the Council for a Better Louisiana, and Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council, both issues-oriented research groups, said Jindal has developed the reputation as a vetoing governor because he has killed some high-profile bills that made it through the Legislature. They include bills to double the pay of legislators, to grant a \$30,000 salary increase to the elected five-member Public Service Commission, and a handful of bills to make exceptions to the conflict-of-interest part of the ethics code.

He also rejected legislation to set up a race track with slot machines in Iberville Parish and to make changes in the laws dealing with the licensing of video poker.

"These are the issues that attracted attention, and a lot of attention," Erwin said. "But jumping to the conclusion that he is going to be veto-happy and veto bills right and left is going too far to say at this point."

Brandt said the bills Jindal vetoed tended to be the "hot-button issues, like pay raises and ethics exceptions" that grabbed headlines, "not the obscure, small issues."

Brandt said Jindal's 258 cuts to the state operating budget excising more than \$16 million in pet projects of lawmakers also grabbed a lot of attention. "He left \$39 million standing" in the budget that also could have been slashed for lawmakers' pet projects.

Legislative records compiled by the House and Senate as well as the Louisiana News Bureau, a service that tracks bills, show that the only governor other than Treen in recent times to hit triple digits for vetoes was Buddy Roemer, who killed 145 bills, including 52 in 1991 and 40 in 1990. Roemer also is the only governor in recent times to have a veto overridden by the Legislature.

While rumblings of discontent from lawmakers who lost money for projects is still being heard, Sen. Danny Martiny, R-Kenner, and Rep. Jane Smith, R-Bossier City, who are co-chairmen of the Republican legislative delegation, called on GOP colleagues to vote against coming back for a special override session Aug. 2-6.

The session is automatically scheduled each year, but lawmakers have always voted to cancel it. Although it takes a majority of lawmakers to scrub the session, it takes a two-thirds vote to override a governor's veto.

Smith said many lawmakers are angry at losing money for back-home projects, but that is not enough of a reason to return to Baton Rouge. "Many are worthwhile projects but not something government should be involved with," Smith said.

Martiny said that although he believed some of the vetoes were worthy of being overridden, "why do we want to come back? It would help him (Jindal) politically. We would go back in and he could say we are trying to override the veto on the (legislative) pay raise," an issue that lawmakers took a lot of flak for passing.