

Jindal's GOP response to Obama's speech

by UPI

BATON ROUGE, La. - The following are remarks made Tuesday by Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal in Baton Rouge to President Barack Obama's speech before Congress.

Good evening, and happy Mardi Gras. I'm Bobby Jindal, governor of Louisiana.

Tonight, we've witnessed a great moment in the history of our republic. In the very chamber where Congress once voted to abolish slavery, our first African-American president stepped forward to address the state of our union.

With his speech tonight, the president completed a redemptive journey that took our nation from Independence Hall to Gettysburg to the lunch counter and now finally the Oval Office.

Regardless of party, all Americans are moved by the president's personal story, the son of an American mother and a Kenyan father who grew up to become leader of the free world.

Like the president's father, my own parents came to this country from a distant land. When they arrived in Baton Rouge, my mother was already four-and-a-half-months pregnant. I was what folks in the insurance industry now call a pre-existing condition.

To find work, my dad picked up the yellow pages and started calling local businesses. Even after landing a job, he still couldn't afford to pay for my delivery, so he worked out an installment plan with the doctor. Fortunately for me, he never missed a payment.

As I grew up, my mom and dad taught me the values that attracted them to this country, and they instilled in me an immigrant's wonder at the greatness of America.

As I -- as a child, I remember going to the grocery store with my dad. Growing up in India, he had seen extreme poverty. As we walked through the aisles, looking at the endless variety on the shelves, he would tell me, "Bobby, Americans can do anything."

I still believe that to this day: Americans can do anything. When we pull together, there's no challenge we can't overcome.

As the president made clear this evening, we're now in a time of challenge. Many of you listening tonight have lost jobs; others have seen your college and your retirement savings dwindle. Many of you are worried about losing your health care and your homes. You're looking to your elected leaders in Washington for solutions.

Republicans are ready to work with the new president to provide these solutions. Here in my state of Louisiana, we don't care what party you belong to if you have good ideas to make life better for our people. We need more of that attitude from both Democrats and Republicans in our nation's capital.

All of us want our economy to recover and our nation to prosper. So where we agree, Republicans must be the president's strongest partners. And where we disagree, Republicans have a responsibility to be candid and offer better ideas for a path forward.

Today in Washington, some are promising that government will rescue us from the economic storms raging all around us. Those of us who lived through Hurricane Katrina, we have our doubts.

Let me tell you a story. During Katrina, I visited Sheriff Harry Lee, a Democrat and a good friend of mine. When I walk into his makeshift office, I had never seen him so angry. He was literally yelling into the phone. "Well, I'm the sheriff, and if you don't like it, you can come and arrest me." I asked him, "Sheriff, what's got you so mad?" He told me that he put out a call for volunteers to come with their boats to rescue people who were trapped on their rooftops by the floodwaters. The boats were all lined up and ready to go. And then some bureaucrat showed up and told him they couldn't go out in the water unless they had proof of insurance and registration.

And I told him, "Sheriff, that's ridiculous." Before I knew it, he was yelling in the phone. "Congressman Jindal's here, and he says you can come and arrest him, too." Well, Harry just told those boaters ignore the bureaucrats and go start rescuing people.

There's a lesson in this experience: The strength of America is not found in our government. It is found in the compassionate hearts and the enterprising spirit of our citizens.

We're grateful for the support we've received from across the nation for our ongoing recovery efforts. This spirit got Louisiana through the hurricanes, and this spirit will get our nation through the storms we face today.

To solve our current problems, Washington must lead. But the way to lead is not to raise taxes, not to just put more money and power in the hands of Washington politicians. The way to lead is by empowering you, the American people, because we believe that Americans can do anything.

That's why Republicans put forward plans to create jobs by lowering income tax rates for working families, cutting taxes for small businesses, strengthening incentives for businesses to invest in new equipment and to hire new workers, and stabilizing home values by creating a new tax credit for homebuyers. These plans would cost less and create more jobs.

But Democratic leaders in Congress, they rejected this approach. Instead of trusting us to make decisions with our own money, they passed the largest government spending bill in history, with a price tag of more than \$1 trillion with interest.

While some of the projects in the bill make sense, their legislation is larded with wasteful spending. It includes \$300 million to buy new cars for the government, \$8 billion for high-speed rail projects, such as a magnetic levitation line from Las Vegas to Disneyland, and \$140 million for something called volcano monitoring.

Instead of monitoring volcanoes, what Congress should be monitoring is the eruption of spending in Washington, D.C.

Democratic leaders say their legislation will grow the economy. What it will do is grow the government, increase our taxes down the line, and saddle future generations with debt.

Who amongst us would ask our children for a loan so we could spend money we do not have on things we do -- we do not need? That is precisely what the Democrats in Congress just did. It's irresponsible. And it's no way to strengthen our economy, create jobs, or build a prosperous future for our children.

In Louisiana, we took a different approach. Since I became governor, we cut more than 250 earmarks from our state budget. To create jobs for our citizens, we cut taxes six times, including the largest income tax cut in the history of our state. We passed those tax cuts with bipartisan majorities.

Republicans and Democrats put aside their differences. We worked together to make sure our people could

keep more of what they earn. If it can be done in Baton Rouge, surely it can be done in Washington, D.C.

To strengthen our economy, we need urgent action to keep energy prices down. All of us remember what it felt like to pay \$4 at the pump. And unless we act now, those prices will return.

To stop that from happening, we need to increase conservation, increase energy efficiency, increase the use of alternative and renewable fuels, increase our use of nuclear power, and increase drilling for oil and gas here at home.

We believe that Americans can do anything. And if we unleash the innovative spirit of our citizens, we can achieve energy independence.

To strengthen our economy, we also need to address the crisis in health care. Republicans believe in a simple principle: No American should have to worry about losing their health care coverage, period. We stand for universal access to affordable health care coverage.

What we oppose is universal government-run health care. Health care decisions should be made by doctors and patients, not by government bureaucrats.

We believe Americans can do anything. And if we put aside partisan politics and work together, we can make our system of private medicine affordable and accessible for every one of our citizens.

To strengthen our economy, we also need to make sure that every child in America gets the best possible education. After Hurricane Katrina, we reinvented the New Orleans school system, opening dozens of new charter schools and creating a new scholarship program that is giving parents the chance to send their children to private or parochial schools of their choice.

We believe that with the proper education the children of America can do anything. And it shouldn't take a devastating storm to bring this kind of innovation to education in our country.

To strengthen our economy, we must promote confidence in America by ensuring ours is the most ethical and transparent system in the world. In my home state, there used to be saying: At any given time, half of Louisiana was said to be half underwater and the other half under indictment.

Nobody says that anymore. Last year, we passed some of the strongest ethics laws in the nation. And today, Louisiana has turned her back on the corruption of the past.

We need to bring transparency to Washington, D.C., so we can rid our capital of corruption and ensure that we never see the passage of another trillion-dollar spending bill that Congress hasn't even read and the American people haven't even seen.

As we take these steps, we must remember, for all of our troubles at home, dangerous enemies still seek our destruction. Now is no time to dismantle the defenses that have protected this country for hundreds of years or to make deep cuts in funding for our troops.

America's fighting men and women can do anything. If we give them the resources they need, they will stay on the offensive, defeat our enemies, and protect us from harm.

In all these areas, Republicans want to work with President Obama. We appreciate his message of hope, but sometimes it seems like we look for hope in different places.

Democratic leaders in Washington, they place their hope in the federal government. We place our hope in you, the American people.

In the end, it comes down to an honest and fundamental disagreement about the proper role of government. We oppose the national Democratic view that says the way to strengthen our country is to increase dependence on government. We believe the way to strengthen our country is to restrain spending in Washington, to empower individuals and small businesses to grow our economy and create jobs.

In recent years, these distinctions in philosophy became less clear. Our party got away from its principles. You elected Republicans to champion limited government, fiscal discipline, and personal responsibility.

Instead, Republicans went along with earmarks and big government spending in Washington. Republicans lost your trust, and rightly so.

Tonight, on behalf of our leaders in Congress and my fellow Republican governors, I say this: Our party is determined to regain your trust. We will do so by standing up for the principles that we share, the principles you elected us to fight for, the principles that built this in the greatest, most prosperous country on Earth.

You know, a few weeks ago, the president warned that our country is facing a crisis that he said, in quotes, "we may not be able to reverse." You know, our troubles are real, to be sure, but don't let anyone tell you that we cannot recover. Don't let anyone tell you that America's best days are behind her.

This is the nation that cast off the scourge of slavery, overcame the Great Depression, prevailed in two World Wars, won the struggle for civil rights, defeated the Soviet menace, and responded with determined courage to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The American spirit has triumphed over almost every form of adversity known to man, and the American spirit will triumph again.

We can have confidence in our future because, amid all of today's challenges, we also count many blessings. We have the most innovative citizens, the most abundant resources, the most resilient economy, the most powerful military, and the freest political system in the history of the world.

My fellow citizens, never forget: We are Americans. And like my dad said years ago, Americans can do anything.

Thank you for listening. God bless you. God bless Louisiana. And God bless America.

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