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Jindal flexing muscles to help GOP campaigns

Governor helps out-of-state candidates

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Republicans inside and outside Louisiana are using Gov. Bobby Jindal’s political muscle on the campaign trail.

Jindal recently traveled to Missouri and Mississippi to stump for two friends seeking office.

Back home in Louisiana, Jindal is contributing to the GOP cause by helping Republican candidates raise money and by offering his advice.

“This is something he’s stepped up and offered on his own, and we’re taking advantage of it,” said Roger Villere, chairman of the Republican Party of Louisiana.

The number of invitations the governor is getting indicates that he is the go-to guy for energizing the conservative base, Villere said.

In talking about his trip to Missouri, Jindal had more to say about the state’s search-and-rescue team than the longtime friend he went there to help.

Congressional candidate state Sen. Bill Cassidy said Jindal is active behind the scenes. He said the governor gives advice on pollsters, hosts private fundraisers and phones key national GOP figures.

“A lot of people supporting the governor are supporting me. It was a natural team if you will,” said Cassidy, R-Baton Rouge.

The governor also is a forgiving supporter.

Cassidy said no mention has been made of a letter he wrote in 2003 questioning Jindal’s ability to run the state.

In the letter, Cassidy wrote that Jindal “does not indicate that he is capable of the much harder job of governor.”

Cassidy based his opinion on Jindal’s job performance as head of the state Department of Health and

Hospitals.

Jindal ran for governor in 2003 and lost to Kathleen Blanco in a runoff. He ran again last year and won.

Cassidy said the letter was written years ago and that he considers the Jindal administration to be very successful.

“This is not personal,” he said. “I can promise you there’s been policy differences with my wife, and my wife and I have recovered quite nicely, thank you.”

Besides helping Cassidy, Jindal has given his political support to state Treasurer John Kennedy, U.S. Rep. Kenny Hulshof, R-Mo., and U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss.

The governor has:

- Traveled to Missouri to help gubernatorial candidate Hulshof raise money.
- Attended a fundraiser Sept. 25 in Jackson, Miss., for Wicker.
- Hosted a June 26 fundraiser for Cassidy. The event raised \$200,000 for Cassidy’s congressional campaign.
- Co-hosted an April 22 fundraiser for Kennedy. President Bush also attended the event, which raised \$500,000 for Kennedy’s U.S. Senate campaign.

Kennedy said it is hard to measure whether the governor can substantially influence an election through his involvement.

He said voters probably take the governor’s endorsement into consideration along with a multitude of other issues.

Kennedy said Jindal is supposed to host another fundraiser for him in a few weeks.

“He’s been very supportive, and I’m grateful,” he said.

Cassidy is running against U.S. Rep. Don Cazayoux, D-New Roads, and state Rep. Michael Jackson, no party, Baton Rouge, in the 6th District.

Kennedy, a Republican, is challenging U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La.

Villere said Jindal prefers to offer low-key assistance rather than telling voters how to vote.

Outright endorsements, letters and commercials are not the governor’s style, he said.

“(Jindal) feels like his strength is behind the scenes,” Villere said.

The Cassidy campaign is circulating a pamphlet that depicts presidential candidate John McCain, Jindal and Cassidy as “the team that can fix what’s broken” in Washington, D.C.

The pamphlet contains a small picture on an inside fold of Cassidy and Jindal taken at a fundraiser.

In Missouri, Jindal was a little more outspoken, praising Hulshof as bipartisan and an advocate for ethics reform.

“He was willing to buck his party and his own party’s leadership when it came to standing for integrity and when it came for standing for ethics. They kicked him off the ethics committee because he was such a strong champion of ethics. He stood up against his own party’s leadership,” Jindal told Missouri’s KRCG television station.

Hulshof characterizes himself as an “unapologetic conservative” who was brought up to “pray often.” Those ideals mesh with Jindal’s personality.

Wicker also is a colleague from Jindal’s days on Capitol Hill. Wicker is trying to hold onto the U.S. Senate seat he was appointed to when Trent Lott resigned.

Villere said Jindal is in demand, in part, because he is an articulate speaker who is able to relate to his audience.

“He’s really created an excitement, especially in the conservative movement,” he said.

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