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Jindal Tours Airports to Launch Campaign

U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal officially launched his gubernatorial campaign Monday with a promise to purge corruption from state politics.

Jindal steered clear of the latest Louisiana scandal to make national headlines: allegations that U.S. Sen. David Vitter used a Washington, D.C., escort service.

“We addressed that on Friday. Today is about where we go for Louisiana,” Jindal, R-Kenner, said in response to questions during a campaign stop at a Baton Rouge aircraft hangar.

Jindal’s campaign kickoff came three days after he issued a statement expressing disappointment in “Sen. Vitter’s actions.”

The two-sentence statement is all Jindal wants to say for now about the Republican leader who was supposed to rally support for his campaign.

“Today is about the future,” he said.

Jindal and his wife, Supriya, traveled to seven airports across the state to kick off his governor’s campaign.

The primary is Oct. 20.

They started the day in Baton Rouge, where they greeted several hundred supporters.

Jindal shook hands and signed campaign signs.

He made it clear he wanted to focus on the campaign and not on his fellow congressman’s alleged misconduct.

Jindal vowed to call a special session of the Legislature to address ethics reform if he is elected governor.

He criticized legislators for failing to embrace the issue during the recent session.

Lawmakers killed legislation last month that would have required them to publicly disclose their debts and income sources.

Jindal said ethics reform would be the first chapter in his mandate to change the state.

He did not go into details.

He urged supporters to join him in a war on corruption, incompetence and out-of-control government spending.

“Oh, by the way, I am here to announce my candidacy,” Jindal said.

At one time, Vitter was considered a powerful ally in Jindal’s aspirations to lead the state.

Vitter became a Republican heavyweight in the state after winning his U.S. Senate seat outright.

He threw his support to Jindal early, urging GOP supporters in February to contribute to Jindal’s campaign.

State Senate Republican leader Tom Schedler of Mandeville said Monday he expects Vitter to play a reduced role in the governor’s race.

He said he does not expect Jindal to totally spurn Vitter’s support.

“He’ll be cautious. But I don’t think he’ll certainly disown (Vitter) by any means,” Schedler said.

State Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, said Jindal is a strong candidate on his own.

“He has the ability to excite people including some people who voted against him last time,” Scalise said Monday, referring to Gov. Kathleen Blanco’s 2003 victory over Jindal in the runoff.

Blanco is not seeking a second term.

Shreveport political analyst Elliott Stonecipher compared the momentum of Jindal’s campaign to a train.

The Vitter fallout may slow down the train but it will not derail it, he predicted Monday.

Jindal may win the primary with 52 percent of the vote instead of 57 percent, Stonecipher said.

University of Louisiana at Lafayette political science Professor Pearson Cross also said he thinks Jindal will win the primary with or without Vitter.

“I don’t think we’ll see David Vitter out on the stump campaigning for Bobby Jindal, and that’s a loss,” he said Monday.

It is not enough of a loss to really hurt Jindal’s chances, Cross said.

(Michelle Millhollon)