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On the hustings in Iowa, Bobby Jindal underscores his stand on immigration

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DENISON, Iowa — Bobby Jindal warns that this nation's historic melting pot could turn into a European-style "salad bowl" unless U.S. immigration policy embraces assimilation. "Immigration without assimilation is not immigration. Immigration without assimilation is an invasion," said Jindal, who is one of 17 Republicans seeking the presidential nomination. The Louisiana governor toured parts of western Iowa Wednesday as part of a five-day swing through the state. He spoke at Cronk's Restaurant in Denison, where a crowd of about 55 gathered to hear his speech and ask questions.

Later, he visited a livestock operation in rural Holstein — an event sponsored by the Iowa Federation of Republican Women.

Jindal is near the bottom of the GOP pack in recent polls. He did not make it into the prime-time Republican television debate last month on Fox News, and he is not going to make it onto the main stage of the CNN debate. (He will participate in a secondary debate featuring the six or seven candidates who are at the bottom in the polls.)

But Jindal has said he is in the race for the long haul. His hope is to build a solid grass-roots network that will serve as the launching pad for a surge in the final weeks or months before the caucuses, when Iowans get serious about choosing a presidential nominee.

In other words, Jindal hopes to re-create Rick Santorum's 2012 effort, when the former Pennsylvania senator suddenly bolted to the front of the pack.

A recent Des Moines Register poll indicated that Jindal may be having some success in boosting his name recognition and favorability rating among caucusgoers.

The Register's pollster, Ann Selzer, has even reportedly called Jindal the "hidden winner" in the poll, noting that his favorability rating grew from 43 percent to 61 percent over the last four months.

Jindal is clearly courting the more conservative and evangelical blocs within Iowa's Republican base.

He uses some of the most strident language on the trail when it comes to illegal immigration, and he frequently talks about the need to protect "religious liberty" in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage.

He has noted repeatedly that his parents legally immigrated to this country from India shortly before he was born in Louisiana.

He has said he considers himself simply an American and not an Indian-American. "I'm tired of the hyphenated American," Jindal said in Denison.

Immigrants who are legally allowed into this country should be required to learn English and adopt this nation's "values," he said. He accused Democrats of having a "European" attitude toward immigration, saying Democrats don't believe newcomers to this country should be required to assimilate into the American way of life.

"The left no longer wants America to be a melting pot it's somehow xenophobic to say you have to be an American if you come here," Jindal said.

As for his opponents in the race, Jindal threw a few pointed jabs at two GOP front-runners: Donald Trump and Jeb Bush.

Jindal said he may not have a former president for a father like Bush or a reality show like Trump. But Jindal, who has been governor since 2008, argued that he is the only candidate in the race with a record of cutting state spending.

The Cato Institute has said that Jindal has cut state spending on a per capita basis by an average 2.3 percent a year.

"We need a doer, not a talker," Jindal said.