

THE HILL



Lessons from Louisiana

By: Mark Mellman – April 9, 2013

Republicans love pointing to their governors, arguing they chart the party's course to success on a national scale. "Republican governors are America's reformers in chief," boasted the Republican National Committee's autopsy report. In particular, they love pointing to Louisiana's Bobby Jindal. Anti-tax maestro Grover Norquist publicly urged Mitt Romney to put Jindal on his ticket as the vice presidential nominee in 2012, as did social conservative Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council. Newt Gingrich praised him as "America's most transformational governor," envisioning the Louisiana governor as his party's future.

Among the moves that cemented his reputation for GOP cognoscenti: attacking teachers and putting forward a plan to eliminate the income tax, replacing it with a sales tax. How'd that go? GOP cheerleaders ate it up but Louisiana voters hated it, and now Jindal has been forced into surrender on his tax plan.

Norquist went gaga over the governor's tax plan, calling it "the boldest, most pro-growth state tax reform in U.S. history" and labeling it "a gold standard for pro-growth reform." The Koch brothers' Cato Institute called it "superb." And, expressing flattery through imitation, North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory and others were soon pushing similar plans. The result of the advice from Cato, Norquist and other Republicans: Bobby Jindal is now less popular in Louisiana than Barack Obama, who lost the state by 17 points.

Jindal's earlier tumble came in the wake of his education plan: according to polls by Southern Media and Opinion Research, it was opposed by a 13-point margin, with a 54 percent majority opposing Jindal's school voucher program in particular. By September 2012, his approval rating had fallen from 64 percent a year earlier to just 51 percent. Jindal unveiled his tax plan earlier this year, and now his approval rating has plummeted to just 38 percent, 5 points lower than Obama's. Among independents, just 30 percent approve of the governor's performance.

And that "gold standard" of a tax plan that followed Norquist's predilections to a tee?

Only 27 percent of Louisianans support it, while 63 percent are opposed. Less than half of Republicans, only 29 percent of independents and 34 percent of whites voiced support for it. Indeed, there is just one single segment of the electorate in which even a bare majority favors Jindal's plan: Republican men. Earlier this week, Jindal was forced to abandon his tax plan altogether.

Other policies espoused by the GOP, which are near and dear to Jindal's heart, also fared poorly with voters. By 2-1, Louisiana voters said "we've cut enough from the state budget and we need to get additional revenue to avoid further reductions," rejecting the view that "we need to continue cutting state government's budget." Even Republicans have

become wary of budget cutting, with only 53 percent endorsing them and 61 percent of independents opposed.

Jindal's privatization schemes also ignited voters' ire. By 2-1, they oppose privatizing public hospitals to reduce state spending, as the governor proposed.

With Jindal down for the count, how well are those other paragons of political virtue — GOP governors — faring? Not too well. Rick Scott attacked teachers and other public employees while cutting taxes for the rich and restricting abortion rights, and now just 34 percent of Floridians approve of his performance. Pennsylvania's Tom Corbett gets positive approval ratings from 34 percent, but negative assessments from 48 percent.

Kansas' Sam Brownback, Michigan's Rick Snyder, Maine's Paul LePage, Georgia's Nathan Deal, South Carolina's Nikki Haley and even Rick Perry of Texas all find themselves underwater, with negative performance evaluations outnumbering positive ones.

Republicans should think twice before looking to their governors for political salvation. Many are on the road to perdition, at least as far as voters are concerned. The GOP should be equally reticent about following the advice of Washington ideologues whose policies and plans just get them into deep, career-ending trouble.