

Will Bobby Jindal's All-American Dream Lead Him to the White House?

Bobby Jindal's historic election as America's first governor of Indian decent catapulted him into the limelight. Now the light's even brighter as he considers a run for the White House.

Jindal grew up not far from the governor's mansion.

"Growing up in Baton Rouge, did you ever think you'd be living here?" CBN News' Jennifer Wishon asked him during a recent chat in the elegant old mansion.

"No," he replied. "Growing up my dad was very firm; he wanted us to be doctors."

He could have pursued his dad's dream, but despite getting into medical and law schools at both Harvard and Yale Jindal chose a life of public service.

'Call Me Bobby'

His parents named him Piyush, but as a young boy, Jindal picked a nickname that stuck.

He laughed as he remembers the story.

"You know, I was 4 years old. I used to come home from school and at that time I was allowed to watch a little TV," he recalled. "One of the shows that was in syndication was the 'Brady Bunch.' It was one of my favorite shows."

"I would watch it every afternoon," he continued. "And if you remember, Bobby Brady was the youngest boy on that show and I guess I just identified with him because we were the same age,

had the same interests, you know. We didn't like girls; we liked to play football."

"So one day my mom was picking me up from school and the teacher said, 'Well, your son has got a new name.' And she said, 'What are you talking about?'" he said. "And apparently I just showed up one day without asking her for permission and told all my friends to call me Bobby. From that day on and they did."

Jindal's parents immigrated to Louisiana from India while his mother was pregnant with him. They traveled half-way across the world in search of a better life.

Jindal says he ran for public office to ensure their grandchildren don't have to leave Louisiana to achieve their American dream.

"My parents, but my dad especially, has lived the American dream," Jindal told CBN News. "One of nine kids, he's the only one who got past the fifth grade. He literally grew up in a house without electricity, without running water.

"He worked extremely hard and got his first job by calling companies out of the Yellow pages until somebody would hire him here in Baton Rouge," he said.

Son of Immigrants

CBN News asked Jindal if the debate over immigration reform is personal to him given that he is the son of immigrants.

"This to me is such a simple issue where we are today. We don't need a thousand-page bill, a comprehensive bill out of the Senate," he replied. "We need to secure the border.

"I think it's pretty simple, you know," he continued. "The president keeps talking about it. We need to just do it. And the reality is, if he was serious about it—he's been president now; he's in his second term—this could have been done by now.

There's no excuse for this."

Despite his southern drawl, Jindal is an extremely fast talker who rarely misses a chance to call out the president.

"I think the biggest frustration right now is it's the rest of the country versus D.C.," he said.

Common Core

He knows something about Washington having served two terms in Congress. Now as a two-term governor he's making education reform a priority.

"One of the most important things we've done is to really give parents, to trust parents in terms of educating their kids," he said.

He's changed his mind on wanting Common Core standards for Louisiana schools.

"I believe this was originally presented as a bottom-up approach and instead has become a top-down approach," Jindal said.

"To me this is the same fight you see when the left tells you we can't trust the American people to buy Big Gulps," he explained.

"We can't trust the American people to exercise their Second Amendment rights," he continued. "We can't trust the American people to have religious liberty; we can't trust the American people to buy their own health insurance to decide what health insurance they want."

It's a calculated fight with Louisiana's Board of Education and now some proponents of Common Core are suing Jindal.

Family Man

Jindal and his wife Supriya have a girl and two boys of their

own to think about educating.

"My kids were 6, 3 and 1 when we moved in the mansion," Jindal recalled as he stood in the foyer of the governor's mansion.

That was six years ago. After long labors with their first two children, Supriya knew their third child, Slade, wouldn't wait for the hospital.

That gave Jindal a chance to finally play the profession his dad dreamed for him as he literally delivered his son at home.

"She was in all this pain and she was literally on the floor," he recalled. "I mean there was no time to get prepared.

"When I saw my son covered in this purple goo; I was thinking 'I don't think he's done, I mean, maybe we should put him back in for a little while,'" he joked.

"But when I handed Supriya our child for the first time, all that pain went away," he said. "She wasn't thinking about anything but her little baby boy and I fell in love with her all over again."

Jindal said Supriya was the first girl he had a crush on in high school and the first girl to break his heart. When he finally got up the nerve to ask her out she said no because her family was preparing to move to New Orleans.

Their reunion came many years later at a Mardi Gras ball. In six short months they were engaged.

"You know, God truly has a plan for us," he said. "Sometimes we don't understand it. If she had said yes in high school, I wasn't ready. I wasn't mature enough. I hadn't even accepted Christ yet in terms of who I was going to become as a person."

An 'Evangelical Catholic'

Jindal grew up in a Hindu home but converted into what he

calls an “evangelical Catholic.”

“You know, I’d love to tell you I had a sudden epiphany, but it wasn’t that easy,” he told CBN News. “You know, for some people it really is easy – they get hit over the head and I think that’s great. For me, it was a seven-year process.”

After a journey of intense reading, study, and self-examination, Jindal said it all clicked one day while attending a church production with a friend.

“In the middle of it they showed a little film, nothing fancy, a black and white film where there was an actor playing Jesus being crucified,” he recalled.

“Now we’ve probably seen a thousand better movies—it was black and white, no famous actors, the camera was probably shaking. But for some reason when I saw the actor on the cross, God chose that moment to hit me harder than I’ve ever been hit before,” he said.

“All of a sudden it just hit me,” he recalled. “That’s really the son of God and He’s up there on that cross, not for a billion people – that’s too easy. He’s up there because of Bobby Jindal.

“He’s up there dying because of my sins, because of what I’ve done, what I’ve failed to do,” he said. “How arrogant for me to do anything but get on my knees and to worship him.”

Jindal talked more about why he thinks the greatest threat to America is the threat from within below.

America’s Greatest Threat

For now, he does what anyone with one eye on the White House typically does: raise money and campaign for candidates competing in the midterms.

After the last presidential election he said the Republican

Party was acting “stupid.”

“When I said we’ve got to stop being the stupid party; we’ve got to offer solutions,” he said. “We cannot just be the anti-party. We’ve got to be for things.

“I think this is still a center-right country and I think that if we will present specific solutions, if we go out there and fight for every vote and say, ‘Not only do we oppose what the other side is doing, we’ve got better ideas,’” he said.

Last fall he launched America Next, a conservative policy group designed to develop some of those ideas.

Jindal suggested America may be its own greatest enemy.

“I don’t think we can be beat by an external enemy. I think the greatest threat to America comes from within,” he told CBN News. “We are blessed to be in the greatest country in the history of the world, but it’s not inevitably so and we’ve got to renew that every generation.

“I think the biggest threat is the erosion of what it means to pursue the American dream,” he explained. “It’s that assault on religious liberties, the undermining of what makes us an exceptional country.”

Jindal was raised Hindu but converted to what he calls an “evangelical Catholic.” Hear him explain the three things that led to his long search for truth:

He’s not expected to make a decision about running for president until after November, but he’s not shy when it comes to talking about who he consults about the future.

“It’s like Jesus, it’s like God gives us the Book of Life. He doesn’t let us look at every page, but He lets us look at the last page and on the last page our God wins. He beats death. He beats Satan. He gets up off that cross,” he said.

“We should rejoice,” he added. “And we should live our lives with grace, glory, and humility animated by that sense that we worship a risen, all powerful God who’s got plans that we won’t necessarily understand.”