

Bobby Jindal speaking truth to GOP power

By Chris Cillizza and Aaron Blake

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal will deliver a forceful denunciation of his party's Washington-centric focus in a speech to the Republican National Committee on Thursday evening, arguing that the GOP is fighting the wrong fight as it seeks to rebuild from losses at the ballot box last November.

"A debate about which party can better manage the federal government is a very small and short-sighted debate," Jindal will tell the RNC members gathered in Charlotte, N.C. for the organization's winter meeting, according to a copy of the speech provided to The Fix. "If our vision is not bigger than that, we do not deserve to win."



Jindal's speech — and his call to “recalibrate the compass of conservatism” — is the latest shred of a growing amount of evidence that the Louisiana governor is positioning himself to not only run for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 but do so in direct (or close to it) opposition to his party in the nation's capital.

In the speech, Jindal will repeatedly caution that Republicans in Washington have fallen into the “sideshow trap” of debating with Democrats over the proper size of the federal government.

“By obsessing with zeroes on the budget spreadsheet, we send a not-so-subtle signal that the focus of our country is on the phony economy of Washington, instead of the real economy out here in Charlotte, and Shreveport (La.), and Cheyenne (Wyo.),” Jindal is set to say at one point in the speech. At another, he will argue that “Washington has spent a generation trying to bribe our citizens and extort our states,” adding: “As Republicans, it's time to quit arguing around the edges of that corrupt system.”

Running against Washington — and the Republicans who inhabit it — is smart politics for Jindal. Congress, viewed broadly, is at or close to all-time lows when it comes to approval ratings. In a Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted earlier this month, just 24 percent of those tested approved of the job that Republicans in Congress were doing.

Even more stunning, among self-identified Republicans only 39 percent offered a favorable rating for their own party's representatives, while 58 percent viewed their own elected officials in an unfavorable light.

Jindal is far from the only 2016 Republican hopeful to use his party's Washington contingent as a foil to bolster his own political prospects. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's (R) rant against House GOPers for failing to bring up a funding bill on Hurricane Sandy – an instant classic – was another prime example of congressional GOPers being triangulated by their party's future leaders.

(Also worth noting: Jindal isn't completely free of Washington's stench, having served three years in Congress before his 2007 election as governor.)

While Jindal's attack on his party's failed focus is the main thrust of the speech, he also took time to excoriate his party for some of the shortcomings made clear during the 2012 election.

* On Mitt Romney's "47 percent" comments: "We must compete for every single vote – the 47 percent and the 53 percent, and any other combination that adds up to 100 percent."

* On the party's struggles to court non-white voters: "We must reject the notion that demography is destiny, the pathetic and simplistic notion that skin pigmentation dictates voter behavior. ...The first step in getting voters to like you is to demonstrate that you like them."

* On the likes of Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock: "It's time for a new Republican party that talks like adults. We had a number of Republicans damage the brand this year with offensive and bizarre comments. We've had enough of that."

And Jindal will also try to demonstrate the sort of big-picture vision – you know, "that vision thing" – that is in demand in a party searching for itself in the electoral wilderness. "We must shift the eye line and the ambition of our conservative movement away from managing government and toward the mission of growth," Jindal will say.

With this speech, Jindal makes a strong case to be the leading voice – or at least one voice in a relatively small chorus – committed to leading the Republican party out of its electoral wilderness.
