

## 2019 Gubernatorial Candidate Survey

A voter information initiative of  
**The Council for A Better Louisiana**  
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### Candidate Profile

Candidate Name: John Bel Edwards

Campaign Website: <https://johnbelforlouisiana.com>

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Hometown: Amite, LA

Party Affiliation: D

Current Job: Governor of Louisiana

Professional Experience: Attorney; U.S. Army

Political Experience: Governor; State Representative

Education: Amite High School, Bachelor's Degree from United States Military Academy, J.D. from LSU Law School

### Image and Leadership

1. What is one thing that distinguishes you from other candidates in the race?

While my opponents both supported Bobby Jindal throughout his disastrous tenure, I've worked with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents for four years to put Louisiana back on the right track. My opponents have criticized the progress we've made since 2015, and doubled down on their positions that we should return to the days of spending cuts to education, health care, and budget instability.

My record, however, is clear: we turned a \$2 billion deficit into a surplus, we have landed more than 160 major economic development projects, including the largest in state history with DXC in New Orleans, we've reinvested in higher education and given teachers a pay raise for the first time in a decade.

2. Please list what you believe are the three most critical factors that are holding Louisiana back from moving forward and reaching our full potential.
  1. Now that the fiscal cliff is behind us, we're finally in a place where we can invest more in **education**. This year we were able to give teachers their first pay raise in a decade. We must continue on that road by bringing teacher pay to the Southern Regional Average and giving our schools and higher education institutions the resources they need. When I talk to companies considering a move to Louisiana, their main question is 'do you have the skilled workers to fill the jobs I'll create?' Our education system is the engine of economic growth and we need to invest in it.
  2. Adequately funding **transportation** priorities must be a focus. We have a \$14 billion transportation backlog. We've returned trust to the Transportation Trust Fund by making sure that money actually goes to transportation. We doubled the annual investment in the Port Priority Program.

And we're finding innovative ways to finance projects, like the use of GARVEE bonds and BP settlement money. But we must come together on a bipartisan basis and find a long-term solution for our infrastructure needs.

3. Over the last three and a half years, Louisiana's uninsured population has been cut in half thanks to Medicaid expansion. We must continue to promote access to health care for Louisiana's working families, so that everyone has the opportunities they need to be successful. Not only does this improve the lives of our people, it gives employers a healthier, happier, more capable workforce to hire from. Further, no rural hospitals have closed and we have saved more than \$300 million in state general fund.
  
3. Listed below are several traits of effective leaders. All are good traits, but please indicate in ranked order the three qualities that best define your leadership style and will show voters the most important leadership qualities you will bring to the governor's office.
  - a. 2 Visionary – Looks beyond today's situation to the future's possibilities. Addresses short-term problems in the context of the big picture. Thinks about where we should be tomorrow, but also where we need to be ten years from now.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Innovative – Challenges and questions the status quo. Has the desire to try new things, and the ability to make them happen.
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Willing to Take Risks – Not afraid to move out in front. Willing to take – and defend – unpopular positions when they are right. Searches for challenging opportunities. Bold enough to experiment and make real changes to improve conditions in Louisiana. Learns from accompanying mistakes.
  - d. 3 Listens and Brings People Together – Listens to citizens and legislators. Asks questions. Brings

together diverse groups and helps them find common ground necessary to solve problems and move the state forward.

- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Doesn't Micromanage – Surrounds him or herself with good people. Doesn't try to do everything alone. Provides direction but delegates authority, allowing others to perform their jobs while ensuring that they remain accountable.
- f. 1 Finishes the Job – Has the ability and resolve to “stay the course” even in the face of adverse circumstances. Doesn't give up easily. Keeps working for positive change despite the pressure of powerful entrenched interests who benefit from the status quo. Committed to producing measurable results.
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

4. List three outcomes you would use to measure your success in your coming four-year-term as governor.

1. Through investments in our K-12 system, raise teacher pay to the Southern regional average and end the pre-k waitlist, moving toward universal pre-k access.
2. Move toward 60% of Louisiana's citizens attaining a college degree or high-value credential by the year 2030.
3. Move toward the elimination of the transportation backlog by making significant infrastructure investments across the state of Louisiana.

## **Transportation / Infrastructure**

5. Louisiana continues to have a serious problem with safety and maintenance of roads, congestion in high-growth areas, and other infrastructure needs. Besides the \$14 billion

maintenance and safety backlog there is also a priority list of billions of dollars of new mega-projects. At the same time, 2019 is the first year that Louisiana did not have sufficient recurring revenues to meet its federal match. Tolling and public-private partnerships are possible mechanisms to raise additional revenues, but options there are limited because of relatively low traffic counts and only certain kinds of projects lend themselves to these approaches. Given these issues, what approach would you take, if any, to improve Louisiana's infrastructure?

The gas tax in Louisiana is 16 cents, and it has been 16 cents for 30 years, and inflation has whittled that down to about seven and a half cents. We have tackled this challenge by becoming more innovative and creative in the way that we finance and deliver projects. We're doing that right now, for example, with GARVEE bonds where we're going to bond out 10% of our federal transportation trust fund dollars over a 12-year period in order to deliver some high capacity projects that are very important, such as the highland interchange on I-10, widening I-10 in Baton Rouge to the split from the bridge and the interchange at I20 at Barksdale. We also just passed the largest transportation and infrastructure bill in 30 years, funded in part by BP settlement dollars. But we need to come together to find a long-term funding solution for our infrastructure.

## **Business / Job Growth**

6. While Louisiana generally has a below average tax burden, our business climate is seen as somewhat non-competitive based on rankings by independent media outlets such as Forbes and CNBC. What steps would you take as governor to improve Louisiana's business climate?

Here's what we've already done: we went from a \$2 billion deficit to surpluses. For the first time in a decade, we reinvested in higher education, and we invested an additional \$39 million in K-12 education just this year. These things matter for businesses looking to invest in our state. And, under my administration, we've brought 165 major economic development projects to the state, creating 34,000 new permanent jobs and over \$40 billion in new capital investment. That includes the largest economic development deal in Louisiana's history with DXC Technologies in New Orleans, which brought 2,000 good paying jobs to New Orleans in 2018.

Louisiana has won other plaudits that point to additional areas of strength: Last year Area Development ranked Louisiana among the top 10 states for doing business for the eighth consecutive year, praising not only its workforce development but also its favorable general regulatory environment, its business incentive programs, and its cooperative responsive state government. The state also won the magazine's 2018 Silver Shovel Award for economic development wins.

Additionally, Site Selection magazine placed Louisiana among the top 10 states for the best business climates for the ninth year in a row last year and ranked it No. 2 for infrastructure investment supporting economic development. Thumbtack ranked it No. 4 for supportive small-business environments. And LED calculates that from 2008 to 2018, the state received more per-capita foreign direct investment than any other.

According to the Tax Foundation, Louisiana has the fifth lowest state and local tax burden in the country. This year, Louisiana reached Tax Freedom Day on April 4<sup>th</sup>, faster than 47 other states, behind only Alaska and Oklahoma.

A recent independent report from LSU concluded that Louisiana is, and I quote, “in the midst of an industrial boom like none in its history.”

My administration is also prioritizing workforce development, so that when companies here they have a skilled and job-ready workforce to hire from.

We’ve still got work to do, but we are on the right path, and Louisiana is doing much better today than we were in 2015.

7. Louisiana, like many states, has significant workforce needs and studies indicate that both now and in the future Louisiana citizens do not have the needed training and skills to meet the workforce needs of a changing economy. As governor, what would you do to meet the growing workforce needs that are impacting Louisiana employers?

Earlier this year I rolled out my plan to make Louisiana’s workforce the most job-ready in the country in my second term. We can do that by giving every Louisiana high school Junior and Senior access to dual enrollment classes, by increasing access to the Incumbent Worker Training Program, by re-enacting the Apprenticeship Tax Credit, and continuing to improve FastStart, the nation’s number one ranked workforce development program.

Under this administration, we’ve already worked to increase our workforce development and training programs. For example, we were able to bring 220 new direct jobs to Lafayette with Viemed, a company that took advantage of the FastStart workforce training program. The DXC project in New Orleans was possible, in part, because of our commitment to use our higher education system to provide skilled workers.

We’ve also been innovating in the field of cybersecurity training and development: in Bossier Parish, for example, we worked to

bring in-person and online trainings with Cybint Solutions through, Bossier Parish Community College, which will establish a cyber center to provide cyber trainings for people here and around the world.

## Higher Education

8. Higher education in Louisiana has been cut by more than \$800 million since 2009. Though many of these cuts have been mitigated by higher tuition and fees there has been only minimal state reinvestment in postsecondary education the last couple of years – a stark contrast from what has been seen in most other states. What is your view on providing additional funding to higher education, and do you have any priorities for where additional funding should go?

While my predecessor cut higher education more than any other state in the country, as Governor, I have positioned higher education for success. That comes on the heels of three consecutive years of stable funding. My record on higher education is something I'm very proud of: we are fully funding TOPS and this year we finally made the first net new investment in higher education in a decade. As a result, we've also seen more and more graduates choose to stay in Louisiana, we've seen bigger class sizes at LSU, and we've seen larger faculty retention.

9. The Louisiana Board of Regents has set an ambitious goal of boosting the state postsecondary education attainment rate from the current level of about 44% to 60% by 2030. That means significantly more of our citizens will need post-secondary training. Complicating this is the fact that college costs have risen considerably in recent years, Louisiana has the nation's second-highest poverty rate, and needs-based financial aid is limited for recent high school graduates and almost non-existent for working-age adults. As governor, what



policies would you support to increase the level of education attainment in our state?

There's no question that we need to increase our post-secondary attainment levels, and here's what we've already done:

- we've tripled the number of students getting industry credentials through Jump Start
- Go Grants are funded at the highest level in state history
- we're fully funding TOPS
- we've increased net investments in higher education for the first time in a decade
- and, we've worked hard to bring new and diverse workforce training programs to a variety of community colleges across the state

We also know that students who receive college credit or credentials in high school are much more likely to go on to get a high-level credential or two or four year degree. That's why I am working to ensure that every high school junior and senior in Louisiana has access to college dual enrollment classes.

## **PK-12 Education**

10. In many national circles, Louisiana receives high marks for its education policies in areas such as school accountability, academic standards, quality assessments, quality rating system for early education centers, and its strategies for improving achievement for economically disadvantaged students through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. In looking at Louisiana's broad array of education policies, in general terms, tell us which of Louisiana's education policies you like or dislike and are there any you would seek to change or protect?

I firmly believe that a strong public education system is essential to the well-being of Louisiana children and communities and that all students deserve equitable access to a quality public education that prepares them for college, career and citizenship. Improving educational outcomes in our PK-12 system has been a top priority for my Administration. It is critically important to have all children entering Kindergarten ready to learn. We have supported and will continue to support increased funding for early childhood programs, with the goal of eliminating the wait list for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). The state's teacher evaluation system should be fair and should reflect the quality of the instruction taking place in the classroom. The current evaluation system should be independently reviewed for fairness, validity, and reliability. Finally, we must continue to raise the average teacher salary until it at least meets the Southern Regional Average, while providing for annual increases in the MFP for classroom instruction.

11. Public school “choice” covers a range of options: charter schools, the student scholarship program, course choice, Jump Start, STEM options, dual enrollment and language immersion. Please describe your position on choice in public education, specifically, what kind, if any, you would support, increase, or oppose.

Broadly speaking, I think investing in our children’s education is the greatest investment we can make in our state and our future. That means giving more children more opportunities, and that certainly includes giving more kids access to dual enrollment starting their junior year, for example. I’m proud that under my Administration, we’ve tripled the number of people receiving Jump Start career credentials, while also increasing the number of students graduating from public high schools. We should, however, make sure that schools, and that includes voucher and scholarship schools, are held accountable for the quality of the education they are providing our kids.

12. High-quality early education programs have been shown to help children succeed in school, especially children considered at-risk. Much has been done in Louisiana to coordinate early care and education efforts around the state and give parents a better understanding of the quality of various programs that receive public funding. The biggest missing piece has been funding for children birth to age three. If elected what would you propose in your executive budget with regard to funding for early care and education over the next four years?

This year, we were able to provide the first budget increase for early childhood education in 10 years with a new investment of \$20 million, including \$11 million to pay for child-care assistance for children currently on a waitlist whose parents are in school or working. Our number one priority in the second term is to move towards the goal of universal pre-k, because we know that investing in our children early pays dividends. We're going to have to do this if we're serious about education in Louisiana.

### **Fiscal Responsibility / Tax Structure**

13. There are some who believe we should maintain the degree of budget stability Louisiana is experiencing now and as revenues grow, as naturally occurs in an expanding economy, those funds should be used to invest in things such as early education, higher education or other areas that they feel are important for Louisiana. There are others that believe that as the economy expands and revenues grow with it, taxes should be cut to keep state spending from increasing. Understanding there may be middle ground between these two positions, generally speaking, where do you stand on this issue?

We absolutely should maintain budget stability. When I came into office, my predecessor had left us a \$2 billion deficit, and we worked hard to maintain services for the state. I do think we need to reform our tax code, which is why I supported tax reform in 2017. But we will not go back to the days of budget gimmicks, fund swaps, one-time revenue, and \$2 billion deficits. We can reform our tax code and still meet the needs of our state, but any candidate that suggests we cut taxes without providing the specific areas where they would cut to balance the budget isn't being honest with the citizens of Louisiana.

14. In recent years there has been much discussion about whether Louisiana's tax structure needs to be updated to improve the state's competitiveness. Much of this arose from a report issued by the Legislature's Task Force on Structural Changes in Budget and Tax Policy that was released in 2017. Generally speaking, what are your views on Louisiana's current tax structure and as governor would you undertake a comprehensive effort to change Louisiana's tax structure, or do you think that major revisions are not necessary at this time?

I do think we need to reform our tax structure. We have the 5th lowest tax burden in the entire country. Our nominal rates are far different than our effective rates, and by getting rid of some exemptions and other tax expenditures, we can lower the rates and cut through the clutter, and make our tax code fairer and simpler. In 2017, I asked the Legislature to consider 15 different tax proposals that the Legislature's own Commission had proposed. While any of the Legislature could not get itself together to pass these recommendations then, I'm hopeful that we can work together and find ways to finally simplify our tax code.

One specific proposal I want to consider is to get rid of the federal income tax deduction. We could then in turn lower the income tax rate on 90% of Louisiana taxpayers.

15. There has been much talk about the possible need for a constitutional convention, but less discussion about what parts of the constitution should be changed if a rewrite were undertaken. What is your position on a constitutional convention? Do you believe Louisiana needs a major constitutional change or not, and if so what parts of the constitution would you seek to update?

Our legislature is empowered to amend the constitution by 2/3 vote, which then goes to the people of Louisiana for a vote, which happens on an annual basis, including this year. Our legislature should have the courage to make the comprehensive changes that may be needed to change the constitution through the legislative process. But what I do not want to see is a constitutional convention overtaken by special interests.

16. Louisiana's state pension systems are currently underfunded by more than \$18 billion dollars. The state has been on a payment schedule to retire the liabilities that built up over decades of paying too little into the system. While this has been costly, it has helped reduce our debt. At the same time, while the state has been working to retire that old debt, it has been creating new debt because retirement systems have been utilizing overly-generous expectations of the rate of return on their investments. All of this comes as studies have shown that because of changing work patterns and lifestyles, few state employees or teachers stay in their jobs long enough to earn a meaningful state retirement. If elected, do you plan to pursue pension changes in the next term and, if so, what approaches would you take and what would be your goals?

I have asked the business community to remain engaged on pension reform. We know that the Unfunded Accrued Liability (UAL) of the Louisiana State Employee Retirement System (LASERS) alone is approximately \$6.7 billion. The existing payment schedule is projected to result in a \$2.5 billion reduction in 10 years and a \$6.3 billion reduction in 22 years. But we can't rely on the payment schedule alone to address this massive state debt.

I would like to partner with CABL and other good government groups to develop an evidence-based approach to retire the state's pension debt. The hybrid retirement plan proposed by LASERS in 2018 for certain rank and file state employees can be used as a starting point. My approach to supporting a potential hybrid state retirement plan includes the following guiding principles:

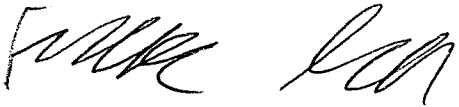
1. Mandatory for new hires but with an opt-out option in the first two years; optional for current state employees.
2. No actuarial cost.
3. Social security equivalent benefit.
4. Maintains the current retirement age of 62.
5. No impact on cost of living adjustments.
6. The changes should not diminish the benefit paid to those who do retire within 20 or more years in the system.

## **Criminal Justice / Public Safety**

7. In 2017 the Legislature passed a package of criminal justice reforms with the goals of lowering the state's highest-in-the-nation incarceration rate, improving outcomes for mostly non-violent offenders returning to society, and saving state dollars. What is your position on the reforms of 2017? Would you continue to implement them as governor, or do you think

changes are needed? And what do you see as the next steps in this process?

I signed the 2017 criminal justice reform package into law, and it's made us both smarter and safer. It's still early, but the results are promising. We're no longer the top state for incarcerating our own citizens, we're saving lives, and we're saving the state money. The reform package brought together a large group of people, from every corner of the political spectrum: we have the ACLU, Grover Norquist, the state DAs, and religious organizations all supporting these changes. On top of all of that, over the next 10 years, the state is projected to save more than \$260 million, 70% of which will be reinvested into programs that will continue to make Louisiana a safer place and help victims of crime by focusing on re-entry. These changes have resulted in \$30 million of certified savings, \$21 million of which has been re-invested.

Staff Signature 

Candidate Signature 

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