



Life In Brief

Current Title: Governor

Political Party: Democratic Party

Born: September 16, 1966

Birthplace: Amite, LA

Religion: Roman Catholic

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Marital Status: Married

Education:

- US Military Academy at West Point (NY), BS, 1988
- Louisiana State University Law Center, JD, 1999

Family:

3 children

Work History:

- Attorney, Edwards & Associates Law Firm
- Governor of Louisiana, 2016-Present

Quick Summary

Former Army captain and lawyer who emphasizes moral values over party loyalty. Believes government is a beneficial force, and prioritizes issues of criminal justice reform and providing health care to Louisianans

- Ran for governor on a platform of common sense and compassion for ordinary people; this vision includes criminal justice reform, accessible health care, and increased pay for teachers

- Governs through the lens of his moral values, even when politically contentious
- Supports lowering mandatory minimum sentences in an otherwise tough-on-crime state
- Applies pro-life approach across health care policy; opposes abortion, but believes “pro-life” also means ensuring everyone has access to health care
- Has an amicable relationship with President Trump and has been invited to several White House events; aware of Louisiana’s reliance on the federal government for funding to address poverty, natural disasters, and pandemics

Approach and Motivations

Deeply values his Catholic faith and uses that moral baseline to govern

- Publicly thanked God for victory in close 2019 election
- Credits his hometown church’s Dominican priests for instilling value of education
- Daughter’s spina bifida and subsequent health issues solidified his pro-life stance, as well as his views on accessible health care
- Wife Donna is involved with numerous charity organizations that focus on education; Edwards also values education and supports efforts to make it more accessible

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Edwards focuses on criminal justice reform, health care, and protecting the environment

Criminal Justice Reform: *Campaigned on a policy to reduce the state’s prison population*



- Has commuted over one hundred prisoners since taking office, including for some who had been given life sentences
- Signed legislation in 2018 that lowered mandatory minimum sentencing and shortened the sentences for nonviolent offenders showing good behavior while in prison

Health Care: *Has a pro-life health care platform; including both opposition to abortion and ensuring universal health care*

- Enacted Medicaid expansion in 2016, halving the number of people without health insurance
- Signed a 2018 bill prohibiting abortions from being performed after 15 weeks, and a 2019 bill prohibiting abortions when a heartbeat is detected, at around six weeks; both laws were struck down by a federal judge in Mississippi

Environmental Protection: *Has outlined ambitious environmental priorities*

- Plans to establish a Climate Initiatives Task Force to review ways to reduce emissions
- Supports improvements to manage the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers to ensure flood protection and ecosystem restoration
- Aims to invest in coastal protection to provide opportunities to businesses and workers

LGBT Equality: *Believes in protecting the LGBT community from discrimination*

- Signed an executive order protecting LGBT individuals from harassment and job dismissals
- Rescinded his predecessor Bobby Jindal's executive order protecting businesses that opposed same-sex marriage from legal punishment for publicly expressing such views

Core Communities

Edwards' core communities include his experienced staff, education-focused wife, and a politically connected law firm

LA politicians: *Has appointed staffers that have backgrounds in Louisiana state politics*

- Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne was a former Republican Lt. Governor
- Chief of Staff Mark Cooper has previously been Office of Emergency Preparedness Director
- Legislative Director Noble Ellington had been a member of the state Legislature for 24 years
- Executive Assistant for Coastal Activities Chip Kline held the same position for Bobby Jindal

First Lady Donna Edwards: *Edwards' wife is a former schoolteacher who involves herself with charitable work, particularly education*

- Created the Louisiana First Foundation to advocate for music and arts education, as well as provide greater resources to foster families
- Partnered with the Louisiana School Boards Association to help raise money for schools damaged by extreme flooding in 2016
- Involved with the Phi Mu Ladies of Louisiana, which raises money to provide scholarships and donations to the Children's Miracle Network

Louisiana Trial Lawyers: *Garnered support from fellow lawyers during his campaigns*

- Was a member of the trial lawyers' trade group Louisiana Association for Justice, suggesting sympathy towards trial lawyers' views
- Enlisted the law firm Talbot, Carmouche & Marcello to spearhead lawsuits against oil and gas companies; this firm has contributed over \$2 million to PACs for Edwards' campaigns



- The contract for the lawyers involved in the coastal lawsuits is managed by Taylor Townsend, a lawyer who managed Edwards' transition team and leads a pro-Edwards PAC

Political History

- Member (LA072 D), LA State House, 2007-2015

Relevant Financial Information

Receives a significant portion of campaign contributions from Louisiana-based lawyers and law firms

Biggest Industry Donors (2006-2020)

- Lawyers and Lobbyists: \$4.6 million
- Hospitals and Nursing Homes: \$980,000
- Real Estate: \$560,000
- Construction Services: \$550,000
- General Contractors: \$390,000

Biggest Corporate Donors (2006-2020)

- Domengeaux Wright Roy & Edwards LLC (Lafayette, LA): \$48,000
- Louisiana Hospital Association (Baton Rouge, LA): \$47,000
- Cox Cox Filo Camel & Wilson (Lake Charles, LA): \$40,000
- Glenn Armentor Law Corporation (Lafayette, LA): \$40,000
- West Carroll Health Systems (Oak Grove, LA): \$40,000

Biggest Individual Donors (2006-2020)

- Marvin Charles Brandt, Self-Employed Attorney: \$26,000

- Glenn J. Armentor, Attorney at the Glenn Armentor Law Corporation: \$23,000
- Kelly and Thomas Townsend, Attorneys: \$22,000
- Raleigh Newman, Attorney at the Law Offices of Raleigh Newman: \$21,500
- J. Rock Palermo III, Attorney at Veron, Bice, Palermo & Wilson: \$20,050

Political Donations

- Contributed \$17,000 to his own 2007 Louisiana House of Representatives campaign
- Contributed \$2,250 to Charlie Melancon's 2010 Senate campaign
- Contributed \$1,000 to Rep. Cedric Richmond's (D-LA02) 2010 Congressional campaign

Publications, Media and Speaking

Edwards' media habits tend to be Louisiana-focused, utilizing national outlets only to highlight issues in Louisiana that need widespread attention

Publications: *Penned a 2019 op-ed about Louisiana's natural gas industry*

- "Shining a Spotlight on Southwest Louisiana, and Our State's Energy Sector," *American Press*, May 14, 2019

Media: *Addresses dire issues on national cable news outlets while discussing state-focused policies on local outlets*

- Preferred Outlets: National cable news outlets like MSNBC, ABC, CBS, CNN; local outlets such as Louisiana Public Broadcasting
- Discusses disasters and tragedies happening in Louisiana, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and severe flooding, with national news outlets



- Discusses state-specific topics like fiscal policy, health care, education, and criminal justice reform with local outlets
- Social Media Habits: Regularly updates Facebook and Twitter; since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, has streamed daily media briefings on Facebook Live

Speaking: *Discusses issues such as fiscal policy and criminal justice reform with Louisiana-focused interest groups*

- Favorite Subjects: Fiscal policy, criminal justice reform, benefits for teachers
- Preferred Audience: Louisiana-specific trade associations and interest groups
- Examples: Discussed funding for municipalities at the Police Jury Association of Louisiana in 2019; encouraged voting and addressed the need for criminal justice reform at a 2018 NAACP conference; highlighted the need for protection of teachers' benefits to the Louisiana Retired Teacher Association in 2018; spoke about ensuring equal economic opportunity at the 2016 Northern Exposure Legislative Forum

Professional Affiliations

- Former President, Amite Kiwanis Club
- Former President, Florida Parishes Skeet and Gun Club
- Member, St. Helena Catholic Church

Family and Personal Background

Born and raised in the small town of Amite, LA to a large Catholic family

- His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were sheriffs
- His mother was an emergency room nurse and sixth grade religion teacher

- Has seven siblings
- His family valued their Catholic faith and instilled faith-based values
- Was valedictorian of his high school class
- Married his high school sweetheart
- His daughter suffered from spina bifida as a child, but grew to be a healthy adult

Criticisms and Controversies

Edwards has attracted criticism among Democrats for his views on abortion; received public criticism for his legal action against oil and gas companies

Abortion restriction legislation

- In 2018, Edwards signed a bill that would prohibit abortions after 15 weeks
- The law would have only gone into effect if a similar law in Mississippi was upheld by a federal court; this law was struck down by the court in November 2018
- In 2019, Edwards signed another bill that would have outlawed abortion if a heartbeat is detected, at about six weeks
- These bills were heavily criticized by many progressive Democrats, particularly women, who had previously supported Edwards; this risked important votes during an election year

Lawsuits against oil and gas companies

- In 2016, gave oil and gas companies an ultimatum to contribute funds to restore the state's eroding coastline or face legal repercussions
- Edwards believed the oil and gas sectors played a large role in the coastline erosion, though critics claimed that natural causes and the levying of the Mississippi river years ago played a more significant role



John Bel Edwards

Governor of LA



- Energy sector officials maintain that they received thousands of coastal permits to conduct operations, and that Edwards should have identified permit violations before taking legal action
- Enlisted the law firm of Talbot, Carmouche & Marcello to spearhead the lawsuits after the energy sector refused to contribute the funds
- The suits were scheduled to take place in 2019, but energy producers are seeking to move them to federal court