



## AP Interview: Barbour reflects as term ends

By: EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS | 12/27/11 10:18 AM

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Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour says the response to Hurricane Katrina shaped his legacy, and the 2005 storm boosted the state's image because outsiders saw Mississippians' willingness to work hard and help their neighbors.

The 64-year-old Republican leaves office when his second term ends at noon on Jan. 10. He plans to travel as a paid speaker and work for BGR, the Washington lobbying firm he helped found two decades ago.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Barbour reflected on what the state did, and didn't, accomplish during the past eight years. He also offered advice for his Republican successor, Phil Bryant, and the lawmakers who begin serving in January. He said leaders should stick to their principles but be willing to compromise to enact policies that could help the state.

"Purity in politics and government is a loser," Barbour said

Barbour chaired the Republican National Committee in the mid-1990s and has raised millions for GOP candidates across the United States since then. He traveled extensively in late 2010 and early 2011 to prepare for a possible 2012 presidential run, even assembling campaign staffs in South Carolina and Florida. In late April he said wouldn't seek the GOP nomination because he didn't have the "fire in the belly" to run an all-out campaign and then, if elected, possibly serve eight years.

Since then, several Republican presidential candidates have rapidly gained popularity, only to drop just as quickly amid gaffes or revelations about their background. Barbour said he has no regrets about pulling back from the race, and he doesn't intend to endorse anyone until Republicans choose their nominee.

He also said he won't run for the U.S. Senate, a job he unsuccessfully sought in 1982.

"I hope and believe this is my last government job," Barbour said of the governorship.

Barbour said he doesn't know whether Republican U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran will seek re-election in 2014. Even if Cochran bows out then, Barbour will be 67.

"I don't think we want a 67-year-old freshman senator," Barbour said. "We want a senator who can build some seniority and serve for 20 years, effectively. You know, my ego is sufficiently in check so it doesn't have to be me."

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On other topics, Barbour had this to say:

AP: What do you think is your biggest bit of unfinished business as governor?

Barbour: "I wish we had not had the kind of economy that we've had to deal with for the last three

years. And particularly what bothers me is that the economy has stayed so flat, so growth has stayed so low.... When the recession hit, one would have expected by now, we would be in a major period of economic growth."

AP: If you could snap your fingers and solve one problem in Mississippi, what would it be?

Barbour: "The biggest structural problem in Mississippi is illegitimacy. Nothing else is close. Fifty-five percent of the children born in Mississippi last year were born out of wedlock, and they're going to be raised without a father in the household.... The data are that a child born out of wedlock without a father in the home is six times — six times — more likely to be raised in poverty than a child born to an intact family. Six times. Then when you look at, what is the chance of an illegitimate child graduating from high school versus from an intact family, becoming addicted to drugs, going to the penitentiary, dropping out of high school, having an illegitimate child herself, having a low-weight baby ... so many of these children who are born out of wedlock and never have a father in the home, it's remarkable how well some of them do.... If there was one structural thing that we could change if I had a magic wand, that would be it."

AP: Do you feel like your administration has done enough to address that?

Barbour: "No. I don't think any administration has. I noticed that Phil Bryant talked about it in his campaign. And hopefully there will become an appetite in the Legislature to try to find ways, acceptable ways, to address the problem more effectively.... But, I found no appetite in the Legislature, even from legislators who privately would tell you it is a terrible problem."

AP: Do you think Mississippi's abstinence-only approach in sex education has been effective?

Barbour: "Well, the numbers speak for themselves. Fifty-five percent of the babies born in Mississippi last year were born out of wedlock, primarily to teenage mothers."

AP: Do you think the abstinence-plus curriculum some school districts are considering should address pregnancy prevention and disease prevention?

Barbour: "Can't hurt. I mean, what we're doing now is not working. Washington County, Miss., has a 79 percent illegitimacy rate.... Seventy-nine percent illegitimacy rate is a tough burden to carry. It's just very hard to have the kind of workforce you want, to have the kind of schools you want, to have the kind of tax base you want. It's not about race, by the way. The illegitimacy rate for white children has exploded. That's a mistake some people make, is thinking this is about race. It isn't. It's a white issue as well as a black issue."

AP: You don't shy away from using the term 'illegitimacy.' A lot of people don't want to say that. On the national stage, would you phrase it in the same way?

Barbour: "Yeah, I mean, I noticed the Tupelo paper editorialized and talked about illegitimacy. The Mississippi Women's Fund came out for exactly the same thing but referred to it as to reduce pregnancies among teenage girls. And, so, I refer to it that way sometimes, too. But most pregnancies — there is a large overlap of illegitimacy and pregnancies for teenage girls. If you reduce one, you'll reduce the other."

AP: Any advice for the new administration and new legislators?

Barbour: "Stick to your principles but understand that perfection is not and should not be achievable in governing Mississippi or any other state in the country. Some people like to attack compromise, but in a body of 174 people not everybody is going to agree on everything... On big issues, you should try to get large majorities. One of Obama's biggest problems is that he crammed Obamacare down the country's throat with no Republican votes and not a vote to spare in the Senate."

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