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I-10: Ten Things to Know in New Orleans this Week (Feb. 28, 2017)



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1. CASSIDY TOWN HALL: FRUSTRATION – AND FUNDRAISING

Town halls around the country are fractious affairs these days for Republican members of Congress and the Senate, but the crowd of hundreds that showed up at the Jefferson Parish East Bank Regional Library in Metairie Feb. 22 for a town hall with U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy was so raucous and furious that CNN began carrying it live.

People began arriving around noon. They held a parking lot rally before the doors opened at 3 p.m., so attendees already were tired of waiting when Cassidy arrived 22 minutes late to the 3:30 p.m. gathering. The senator apologized, saying he was touring tornado damage in New Orleans East, an explanation the crowd of 200 or so jeered and booed.

Cassidy attempted to explain his "Patient Freedom Act" (an alternative to the Affordable Care Act, or ACA) via a PowerPoint presentation, but gave up early and tried to take questions from the crowd via index cards. Eventually Cassidy gave up on that as well and attempted to answer shouted questions. He was mic'ed, but it was hard to hear many of his answers over the crowd noise. Asked about his vote for Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (and the DeVos family's financial support of his campaign), Cassidy began, "The DeVos family decided to support my political campaign because ..." The rest of his reply was inaudible over the booing. Later, he said, "When someone donates to me, they sign up for my agenda; I do not sign up for theirs." More booing.

After the event, *Gambit* asked Cassidy if he thought there were paid protesters in the audience, as the White House and some Congress members have suggested.

"No, no," the senator said. "I assume they're Americans who care about our country, who feel differently about Trump than most folks in Louisiana do. But they're coming out with their constitutionally protected right to assemble and speak. And isn't that a good thing!"

A day later, Cassidy used the raucous gathering as the basis for a fundraising letter he emailed to potential donors. "Yesterday, at one of my town halls, some audience members resorted to shouting and jeering without taking the time to even hear my proposals," he wrote. "I'll listen to every Louisianan because I work for every citizen of our state, not just the ones who voted for me. But I won't sit idly by either while liberal groups intentionally disrupt the work conservatives across the country were elected to do."

Cassidy's email contained several links to his campaign fundraising Web site, but no links to his "proposals" for replacing the ACA. For example, his appeal states, "The media and folks on the left claim Republicans don't have any solutions. That's simply not true – and we need help getting that message out." The back end of that sentence was a link to Cassidy's fundraising site, not to his health care plan. It asked for "\$25, \$50 or whatever you can afford."

2. Quote of the week

"I want to give New Orleans a standing ovation for taking over All-Star 2017 on short notice and doing what they always do: throwing a monster party as only New Orleans can. All-Star weekend can gobble up most cities and leave the locals a little dazed and confused after it's over. But not New Orleans. The city, the Pelicans and Anthony Davis (MVP and now teammate of DeMarcus Cousins) won the weekend. If the Cousins trade produces the desired results, I'll remember this as the weekend New Orleans rose from the lottery ashes." – Sekou Smith of NBA.com

3. Rental registry vote deferred again

The New Orleans City Council has delayed a vote, again, on a rental registry and inspection program. At-Large Councilman Jason Williams and District B Councilwoman LaToya Cantrell sponsored the measure to require most private residential landlords to register their properties with the city and subject them to inspections that must meet a checklist of health and safety requirements. The City Council deferred voting on the measure last month, and on Feb. 23 the council deferred the measure again to March 9.

Under the current draft of the ordinance, registration opens Jan. 1, 2018. Property owners will have to pay a \$60 registration fee, then \$40 for annual renewals. Landlords also will have to pay the costs of inspection.

Cantrell and Williams will "continue to work on the legislation with their fellow Council members and with New Orleans citizens to ensure the best ordinance going forward," according to the City Council's agenda announcement.

4. Warrant clinic to be held March 11

New Orleans civil rights organization Stand with Dignity hosts a warrant clinic March 11, allowing people with warrants for traffic and municipal court or outstanding fines and fees to clear their records without fear of arrest. Chief Municipal Judge Desiree Charbonnet is the coordinator. The clinic is supported by VOTE, Women with a Vision and the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law's Gillis Long Poverty Law Center. The clinic begins at noon Saturday, March 11 at Corpus Christi Church (2022 St. Bernard Ave.).

The Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana also hosts its monthly expungement hour at the Orleans Public Defenders office (2601 Tulane Ave., Suite 700) at 2 p.m. Wednesday, March 8.

5. Brossett's bike rules to go before Council

Five ordinances expanding rules and protections for bicyclists will head to the New Orleans City Council. District D City Councilman Jared Brossett, who created the Council's Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Advisory Committee, authored the rules, which were approved by the Council's Transportation Committee Feb. 22.

The measures align with state laws, like banning cars from bike lanes and requiring cars to stop at pedestrian crossings that have flashing yellow lights. Bicyclists also must yield to pedestrians and use their left and right hands to signal a turn.

New Orleans Regional Planning Commission's Dan Jatres says there aren't clear state or local rules for skateboarders using bike lanes. He says the advisory committee is likely to look into that.

6. 'Smart mix' for low-income housing?

New apartment buildings in New Orleans could be required to set aside 12 percent of their units for low-income residents. The New Orleans City Council will consider a "smart housing mix" report from the New Orleans City Planning Commission that determined mandatory inclusionary zoning rules for Bywater, Marigny, Lakeview and Uptown neighborhoods. Under the rules, buildings with 10 or more units would be required to save at least 12 percent of their units for people who earn \$23,400 or less. Those units would be offered at a reduced rent.

The City Council will consider the report and decide whether to ask the CPC to draft recommended changes to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, the citywide rulebook for all zoning and construction matters.

7. Jim Gaffigan, Louie Anderson coming to town – on the same night

New Orleans has gained stature as a comedy town in recent years, but having two nationally known comedians playing at major theaters at the same time? That will be the case April 21, when Louie Anderson and Jim Gaffigan perform in New Orleans on different stages. Anderson will be at the Joy Theater, while Gaffigan is at the Saenger Theatre. Tickets to both shows went on sale Friday, Feb. 24.

Anderson recently was awarded a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series for his performance as Christine Baskets (mother of Chip and Dale, twins played by Zach Galifianakis) on the FX series *Baskets*. Its second season premiered last month.

Gaffigan starred in *The Jim Gaffigan Show* on TV Land for two years. His "Noble Ape" tour follows his latest hourlong stand-up special, *Cinco*, which debuted on Netflix last month.

8. Tulane to hold discussion on Beyonce's *Lemonade*

In conjunction with International Women's Day, Tulane University's Gender and Sexuality Studies Program hosts a roundtable discussion on Beyonce's New Orleans-centric visual album *Lemonade* and its exploration of race and gender in the South.

On the panel are Regina Bradley, a Harvard University Nasir Jones Hiphop Fellow and African-American literature professor at Armstrong State University; New Orleans filmmaker and Loyola University New Orleans professor Garrett Bradley; Mardi Gras Indian Queen Sula Janet Evans; and Tulane professor Nghana Lewis.

The New Orleans Center for the Gulf South and Newcomb College Institute also support the event, held at Tulane's Rogers Memorial Chapel at 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 8.

9. Nix branch to reopen March 6

The Nix branch of the New Orleans Public Library, in the Carrollton neighborhood, will reopen March 6 after four months of renovations that included a new floor plan, paint, additional public computers and general infrastructure repair. Nix also will have new landscaping and lighting when it reopens.

Hours will remain the same. The library opens at 10 a.m. Monday-Saturday and closes at 8 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 5 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

10. JCC receives bomb threat

A bomb threat called into the Jewish Community Center (JCC) on St. Charles Avenue Feb. 23 was among more than 60

similar threats at Jewish centers across the U.S. in 2017.

On Twitter, Mayor Mitch Landrieu assured the threat was "non-credible" and that the FBI is investigating. While the bombs have all been deemed "hoaxes," Jewish centers nationwide and members of Congress said the threats are very real. In a letter to Department of Homeland Security Director John Kelly, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and FBI Director James Comey, Florida U.S. Rep. Stephanie Murphy and New York U.S. Rep. Joseph Crowley — along with dozens of members of Congress and Jewish-led groups — demanded swift action from law enforcement agencies.

According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), in 2016, there was "one anti-Semitic assault reported in this country every week, and at least two anti-Jewish incidents on average every single day." The ADL's Task Force on Harassment and Journalism counted — from August 2015 to July 2016 — nearly 3 million anti-Semitic tweets. Over the last month, 53 centers in 26 states and one center in Canada received 68 calls, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. President Donald Trump sidestepped questions about the threats during a Feb. 16 press conference. On Tuesday, Feb. 21, Trump called the threats "horrible and are painful and a very sad reminder of the work that still must be done to root out hate and prejudice and evil."

Jewish Voice for Peace New Orleans (JVP), which helped organize a week of actions and presented a list of demands to city and state officials in the wake of Trump's immigration order, said the administration is "flirting with anti-Semitism at the highest levels" in failing to name targets of the Nazi Holocaust and for deflecting questions about anti-Semitism in the U.S. by echoing Trump's support for Israel.

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