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New acute-care facility opens in Bossier City

Shreveport Times | 08.17.07

Promise of Louisiana unveils new acute-care facility.

By Jane Bokun

A big, bright balloon flapping in the wind marked the official opening of Promise Hospital of Louisiana's new \$15 million state-of-the-art Bossier City campus.

"We are poised and ready for the future," said Martin Milner, chief executive officer for the 40,650-square-foot, 50-bed facility.

Promise Healthcare Inc. had its grand opening ceremonies Thursday afternoon with a ribbon-cutting ceremony with about 50 members of the hospital and surrounding community. As a long-term, acute-care facility in Bossier City, Promise Hospital of Louisiana will serve those who require long-term medical care.

According to Promise Healthcare Inc. Chairman Peter R. Baronoff, the facility provides the latest in medical, communications and safety technologies and equipment.

"All that's missing are the patients," Baronoff said.

"We serve patients and family members with compassion and care," said Milner, who grew up in Shreveport and said he came back to serve his community. "We're focused on patient outcomes, not Wall Street statistics."

The hospital's environment provides acute medical care and aggressive therapy services for patients with unresolved, acute, chronic, or catastrophic illnesses. It also provides disease care for those who require a stay of 25 days or more.

The pristine environment was well noted by new hospital staff.

"I think it's a great location," said Julie Compton, a nurse case manager for the new Promise Hospital.

"It doesn't even look like a hospital," said Deborah Hart, a new social worker.

At the new facility, across from Airline High School, there are six full-service intensive care unit rooms, eight direct observation beds, four dialysis unit beds and patient rooms with everything from flat-screen televisions to telemetry monitoring and oxygen delivery.

Promise Hospital of Louisiana's Bossier City campus is one of two area facilities owned by Promise Healthcare Inc., which now owns and operates 15 LTAC hospitals in six states. There also is a Promise Hospital of Louisiana's Shreveport campus (now in the process of a \$3 million renovation).

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070817/NEWS05/708170313/1064/NEWS05>

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Our Views: Ranking has national profile
The Advocate | 08.17.07

For black Americans, as for all Americans, the surest path to the American dream is education.

Southern University's role in opening that path to many black students was underscored in "Diverse: Issues in Higher Education" magazine. An article in the magazine, "The Top 100 Undergraduate Degree Producers," documented the 2005-2006 academic year and cited the number of black graduates from a majority of two-year and four-year institutions. The data included not only historically black colleges and universities, but other colleges and universities, too.

According to the magazine's May 2007 report, Southern conveyed 947 undergraduate degrees to black students during the 2005-2006 academic year, placing the university fourth among the 100 colleges cited by the magazine. Florida A&M University, Howard University and Georgia State University, respectively, were ahead of Southern.

"While we continue to grow a diverse student body, this report proves that we are continuing our mission to be a leader in the education of African-American students," Southern University President Ralph Slaughter said.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, Southern ranked first in the number of undergraduate degrees conferred to black students in the category of health professions and related clinical sciences.

Southern's College of Engineering graduated 67 black engineers during 2005-2006, ranking it fourth in the nation for the number of black graduates produced in that category, according to the magazine. Only Georgia Tech, North Carolina A&T University and North Carolina State University had higher numbers than Southern.

What is important, of course, is not only the quantity of graduates an institution produces, but the quality of its programs. That is why it is important that all of Louisiana's institutions of higher education continue efforts to raise standards and attract the best faculty members.

The ongoing turmoil between Slaughter and the Southern University Board of Supervisors is an unhelpful distraction from Southern's primary mission, educating minds for tomorrow.

As the "Diverse: Issues in Higher Education" report made clear, Southern's mission has not only local, but national relevance.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/opinion/9209387.html>

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Homeland Security Office activates crisis team

The Advocate | 08.17.07

By 2THEADVOCATE.COM STAFF

The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness activated its Crisis Action Team (CAT) today to monitor Hurricane Dean in the Atlantic Ocean, according to a news release issued by the Homeland Security office.

One of the team's primary responsibilities will be to update state and parish agencies on the development and progress of Hurricane Dean as it heads along its projected path toward the Yucatan Peninsula, the statement said.

Earlier today, Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and GOHSEP hosted a conference call to update the heads of state agencies on the developing storm. The CAT will monitor the storm 24 hours a day until Dean no longer poses a threat to Louisiana.

The Homeland Security Office said in the statement it also held conference calls with the Southeast and Southwest Hurricane Task Forces and another conference call with the Louisiana Shelter Task Force to ensure those entities were updated on the latest information. Additionally, GOHSEP has begun testing communications assets with local and federal agencies, contacted and alerted vendors who serve the state to be at the ready, and alerted crucial organizations to the possibility of an activation of the State Emergency Operations Center in the next 24 to 36 hours.

"Louisiana is prepared. We will keep a close eye on Hurricane Dean throughout the weekend," said GOHSEP Director Jeff Smith. "I want to remind our citizens to also do their part and prepare. This storm serves as a reminder that we should be prepared now. I strongly urge our citizens to pick up an evacuation guide and begin planning for your family's safety should this or a future storm head toward Louisiana."

The statement also said that Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Bob Odom is reminding pet and livestock owners to include animals in their hurricane preparation plans.

"Animal ownership is a personal responsibility, and properly caring for your animals during a storm takes careful preparation and planning ahead of time," Odom said. "State and local governments are here to assist but animal care begins at home."

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EBR to test new emergency alert system

The Advocate | 08.17.07

By SONIA SMITH

With Hurricane Dean projected to head into the Gulf of Mexico next week, city-parish officials unveiled a new emergency communication system Thursday designed to alert residents to danger over a variety of mediums.

Baton Rouge will be the first city in Louisiana to pilot the program, which enables officials to call area land lines and cell phones, and send e-mails and text messages, Mayor-President Kip Holden said at a news conference Thursday. City-parish officials are piloting the program, called Connect-CTY, through the end of the year.

“As we enter the busiest part of the hurricane season we want citizens to feel safe and informed,” Holden said.

At the news conference, the mayor recorded a sample emergency message over the telephone, which a group of reporters then received on their cell phones.

“Hello this is Mayor-President Kip Holden, we would like to alert people to the fact that there is flooding on Interstate 10 by the Governor’s Mansion,” he said.

The system can contact all 200,000 households and businesses in East Baton Rouge Parish that have a listed phone number in 15 minutes, said Brendan Cotter, president of the California-based communications firm.

Almost 180 cities nationwide, including Trenton, N.J., and Texas City, Texas, use the program, Cotter said.

All listed landlines in the parish have been included in Connect-CTY’s call database, said Joanne Moreau, director of the Baton Rouge Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

Test calls will begin today, Holden’s office said. Parish businesses will be called beginning at 4:30 p.m., and residences beginning at 6:30 p.m., according to the mayor’s office.

Those with unlisted numbers or wanting to add e-mail addresses or cell phone numbers to their listing can register online at www.brgov.com, Moreau said.

Homeland Security is funding the pilot program, Moreau said. If adopted, the program will cost \$2.50 annually per household or business. The total cost would be \$500,000.

The system will complement existing systems, Moreau said, including the Community Alert System, or CAL, that serves the “Chemical Corridor” in north Baton Rouge.

Connect-CTY is useful because older emergency notification systems, such as CAL, were developed before the cell-phone era, Moreau said.

“We just needed a mechanism to be able to reach more people that are more mobile,” Moreau said.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/9210742.html>

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LaFuria indicted on 269 counts

American Press | 08.17.07

By VINCENT LUPO

Dr. Peter LaFuria, a local OB/GYN, was formally indicted Thursday on 269 felony charges, including five counts of molestation of juveniles.

The molestation counts were originally included in the sexual battery charges LaFuria was previously arrested on, but were updated by Calcasieu Parish grand jurors because of the alleged victims' ages, said prosecutor Cynthia Killingsworth.

Grand jurors heard the LaFuria case Thursday and returned their indictment shortly after 5 p.m. It includes 186 counts of video voyeurism and 78 counts of sexual battery, in addition to the molestation counts.

The offenses allegedly occurred between Jan. 1, 1996, and April 19, 2007.

LaFuria was previously arrested on 170 counts of video voyeurism and 43 counts of sexual battery. His bond was set at \$1.29 million.

LaFuria entered an out-of-state rehabilitation facility after his initial arrest on April 30. He turned himself in on July 11 to face additional charges and posted bond.

He is being represented by local attorney Glen Vamvoras.

LaFuria allegedly took photos of his female patients' genitalia during examinations. Investigators said he didn't have the patients' consent to take the photos.

He is charged with sexual battery based on statements from former patients, who have accused LaFuria of "inappropriate sexual contact during their physical exam," authorities said.

District Attorney John DeRosier said Thursday that the molestation cases involve patients who were juveniles at the time the offenses occurred.

LaFuria has denied any wrongdoing in the case. He is wearing an electronic ankle bracelet so authorities can keep track of his whereabouts, and he has surrendered his passport and driver's license.

The investigation into the voyeurism allegations involved female sheriff's deputies' perusal of numerous computer discs that reportedly contain photos of LaFuria's patients.

Sheriff Tony Mancuso has said the discs contain thousands of photographs. Investigators also examined hard drives on 13 computers seized from LaFuria's home and office April 25. Mancuso said the investigation will likely go down as one of the most costly ever conducted by his office.

In addition to the pending charges, LaFuria faces numerous lawsuits filed by former patients. He filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy May 25 to protect his assets from the litigation.

LaFuria said in a recent bankruptcy hearing that he didn't sell or make money off of any of the photos he took of his patients.

http://www.americanpress.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1518&Itemid=105

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GOP official says state House can be won

The Advocate | 08.17.07

By MARSHA SHULER

GONZALES — Louisiana's political climate makes it more likely Republicans can win a majority in the traditionally Democratic state House, the head of a political action group predicted Thursday.

John Diez, executive director of the LA Committee for a Republican Majority, described for the Ascension Parish GOP Roundtable what he called a perfect convergence of events:

30 of 61 Democrats in the 105-member House face term-limits and cannot seek re-election. Gubernatorial candidate U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal, R-Kenner, is popular and enjoys a big lead. Democratic Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom, who usually gins up Democratic vote, "is tied up" in a contested race while he's under a legal cloud. "The mood is sour for Democrats" in general, he said.

The LA Committee for a Republican Majority is a new political action committee organized by big-money Republicans. Its most recent campaign finance report shows it has \$735,545 in cash on hand as of the end of June. There are 41 Republicans in the House, enough to stop actions that require a two-third vote such as raising taxes and borrowing.

A House majority is 53 votes.

Diez said the group is involved in 20 House races in which Democrats cannot seek re-election because they have completed the three consecutive terms allowed by state law.

Four years ago only three Republican candidates were involved in any of those races, he said. "This time we are finding candidates and giving them the resources," said Diez.

Diez said Republicans also must hold on to seats and that is likely to happen.

Sixteen Republican state representatives cannot run for re-election. Most are in East Baton Rouge, St. Tammany and Jefferson parishes, "where people voted Republican before it was even cool," he said.

"They are defending more seats than we are and we have more opportunities," Diez said.

Diez said polling done by the group shows Republicans also have the edge among registered Democrats. He said only 23 percent of Louisiana's registered voters are true Democrats based on survey work.

Polling also shows "People want change at all levels of government," he said.

There are those who say Republican President George W. Bush's unpopularity will be "a drag" on GOP hopefuls' candidacies, Diez said.

Democratic Gov. Kathleen Blanco "has less popularity than (Bush)," he said.

"If they try to put that albatross around our neck, we can return the favor," he said.

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Registrar drops more than 21,000 from voters rolls

The Advocate | 08.17.07

By MARSHA SHULER

More than 21,000 people have been dropped from Louisiana's voter rolls, state election officials reported Thursday. The names showed up as being registered to vote in other states, according to a report issued by the Secretary of State's Office.

The majority of the people dropped had been registered in areas hardest hit by the 2005 hurricanes, the report stated. About one-third of the voters — 6,932 — were on Orleans Parish rolls, the report says. The next highest registration cancellation occurred in Jefferson Parish where 2,871 voters were dropped. St. Tammany lost 1,558 voters and Calcasieu, 1,138 voters.

East Baton Rouge Parish lost 1,613 voters in the purge, according to the report. Orleans and Jefferson parishes were among the hardest hit by 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which scattered residents throughout the U.S. Many of them have not returned some two years later.

The Secretary of State's Office started out with 53,554 people with potential dual voter registration in June. At the end of challenge period, 21,192 people were dropped from state rolls. The office's elections division compared Louisiana's 2.8 million voter list with those from Texas, Florida, Georgia, Colorado and Tennessee as well as the counties of New York, Las Vegas and San Diego.

Elections Commissioner Angie LaPlace said those areas are among those from which the state got the most requests for absentee ballots to vote in Louisiana elections. The office surveyed to make sure that people weren't trying to vote in two states, she said. The project also served to check voter registration data with other states to make sure the rolls are accurate, LaPlace said. Because no national database exists, LaPlace said Louisiana is working to share information more regularly.

Louisiana has a statewide voter base so it is easier to keep up with voter registration changes from one parish to the other, LaPlace said.

LaPlace said election officials won't do another survey until after the fall elections. The timing depends on how much information is received from other states in the coming months, she said.

Election officials sent out initial notices to 53,554 people in mid-June giving them 30 days to prove they have canceled their registration in another state or that a mistake had been made when Louisiana voter rolls were compared to those in other states.

The state used first and last names as well as date of birth to do the comparison. Some 1,883 voters came off the rolls as of that deadline. A second notice went out in late-July giving the voters another 21 days to clear up any problem with their voter registration at local registrars offices. The 21-day period ended at close of business Wednesday and another 19,309 voters came off the rolls.

"We wanted to give everybody time to update their voter registration information timely before the (Oct. 20) election if they wanted to stay in Louisiana," LaPlace said.

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/9209972.html?showAll=y&c=y>

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Republicans Seek Entrant in Must-Win Bayou Battle CQ Politics.com | 08.16.07

Republicans need a minimal gain to retake the Senate, but they have relatively few ripe targets. So unseating a moderate Democrat in a conservative-leaning state seems to be a necessity. Then why does Mary Landrieu look fairly secure thus far?

Democrats effectively control the Senate by a razor-thin 51-49 margin that suggests their majority is precarious. But that small edge belies the significant disadvantages that face Republicans, who are still smarting from the election last year that ended their majority — and who have nearly twice as many Senate seats to defend next year.

But what if the political winds become more favorable for the GOP? If they are to have any chance of reclaiming the Senate, they almost surely will have to end the career of Louisiana Democrat Mary L. Landrieu after a dozen years.

Landrieu has long expected a more competitive race than most, if not all, of her 11 Democratic colleagues who are up for re-election next year. Louisiana backed President Bush's campaign in 2004 by a 15 percentage point margin. Five years ago, Landrieu won her second term underwhelmingly — she failed to win a majority of votes in the unique, all-party November primary the state had at that time, and so she needed a December runoff election to dispatch, with just 52 percent of the vote, a second-tier Republican opponent. (Louisiana has since established the sort of separate party primaries used for federal elections in the rest of the country.)

And hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which battered Louisiana two years ago, spawned population dislocations, particularly among the overwhelmingly Democratic black electorate in New Orleans, adding to the apparent political limitations of Democrats.

Yet Landrieu enters her campaign in a stronger position than she might have expected just a year ago. She has good approval ratings, a robust treasury and a less liberal voting record than nearly all her Democratic Senate colleagues. Moreover, for the moment at least, she has no announced Republican challenger.

Landrieu has staked out centrist positions and has been concentrating on issues that lack a defined partisan slant, such as securing federal money for coastal restoration.

On Senate votes this year that have pitted most Democrats against most Republicans, Landrieu has sided with her party's majority four out of five times; only one other Democrat, Nebraska's Ben Nelson, has a lower "party unity" score. Among her more prominent recent breaks with her party, she opposed an energy tax package that she said would hurt her state's oil and gas industries and was one of just 15 Democrats who effectively voted to kill an overhaul of immigration laws that, she said, would have been too friendly to illegal immigrants.

Republican strategists say Landrieu is adjusting her voting behavior to recognize the political realities of running for re-election in a conservative-leaning state. In part because of her support for abortion rights and opposition to a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, Landrieu's voting record by and large is less conservative than the two most recent Democratic senators from the state: John B. Breaux, who retired in 2004 after three terms, or J. Bennett Johnston Jr., whom Landrieu succeeded in 1996.

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The senator's other challenges are the political effects of the post-hurricane population displacement — though 2006 returns suggested that it may not hurt Landrieu as much as originally anticipated — and the possibility of sharing a 2008 ticket with a Democratic presidential candidate, like New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who would be more likely than not to lose Louisiana.

GOP officials promise a strong challenger who probably will begin campaigning in earnest after the Oct. 20 gubernatorial election. Republicans say that a likely victory in that race by Rep. Bobby Jindal will embolden the party as it prepares to take on Landrieu. Recent speculation has focused on Secretary of State Jay Dardenne and Treasurer John Kennedy. Kennedy, a conservative Democrat who placed third in a 2004 Senate primary that Republican David Vitter won, would switch parties to run.

As she awaits an opponent, Landrieu has been raising money as if she already had one: As July began, she had in her campaign account \$2.8 million, substantially more than the \$1.6 million she banked at this point six years ago.

This story is part of a series originally published in CQ Weekly. The series will be published on CQPolitics.com throughout the week.

http://www.cqpolitics.com/2007/08/republicans_seek_entrant_in_mu.html

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