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Acclaimed actor, director, producer Robert Redford dies at 89 11A

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The Times-Picayune

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ELECTION 2025

N.O. mayoral candidates tackle income inequality



Spectators watch the mayoral debate between, from left, Royce Duplessis, Frank Janusa, Helena Moreno and Oliver Thomas at The Times-Picayune office on Tuesday.

Hopefuls clash publicly in two debates

BY JAMES FINN
Staff writer

Royce Duplessis and Oliver Thomas attacked their leading competitor in the race for New Orleans mayor Tuesday evening, peppering the consensus front-runner, Helena Moreno, on live TV in an exchange that marked a newly confrontational phase of the election.

Thomas, a City Council member, and Duplessis, a Louisiana state senator, have trailed Moreno by double digits in a series of polls. The three debated twice on Tuesday, first at the newsroom of The Times-Picayune and later at WWL-TV's studios. The forums come at a high-stakes moment in the race as Moreno seeks to expand her lead over the two other major candidates in hopes of

winning the race outright in the Oct. 11 primary. Duplessis, buoyed by a surge of fundraising, and Thomas are fighting to cut into Moreno's lead and force her into a Nov. 15 runoff. Though Duplessis has criticized Moreno's record on the council throughout his campaign, including at the Times-Picayune debate earlier

➤ See **MAYORAL**, page 9A

Palace Café building set to be sold

Motwani family member is buyer, but lawsuits stall deal

BY ANTHONY MCAULEY
Staff writer

The landmark Canal Street building that was the longtime home of the Palace Café is set to be sold to a member of the Motwani family, but ongoing lawsuits from Dickie Brennan's restaurant group have stalled the deal. At issue is the historic Werlein's Music Building, a four-story commercial property in the 600 block of Canal Street, which was constructed in the late 19th century and was the home to Philip Werlein's flagship music store. Dickie Brennan & Co., owned by Brennan, his sister Lauren Brennan Brower, and Steve Pettus, operated the Palace Café there from 1990 until its 35-year lease expired in June and the restaurant closed. The Werlein family has now reached a deal to sell the building to Lenny Motwani, a member of the family that owns a wide array of businesses

➤ See **PALACE**, page 6A

La. doctor picked for vaccine panel

BY MARK BALLARD
Staff writer

WASHINGTON — U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has appointed a Baton Rouge physician to the committee that recommends vaccination policies to the federal government — and she has repeatedly questioned COVID-19 vaccines and other inoculations for children. “I am very, very skeptical,” Dr. Evelyn Griffin said in 2024 while speaking to the congregation of the Rev. Tony Spell's Life Tabernacle Church near Central City. “For a lot of us, the COVID experience has really opened our



Griffin

➤ See **DOCTOR**, page 4A

Financial troubles threaten sustainability of Leah Chase School

BY MARIE FAZIO
Staff writer

New Orleans' only traditional public school will run a half-million-dollar deficit after unanticipated expenses in its second year, district officials said Tuesday, prompting questions about the school's long-term financial sustainability. The Leah Chase School's roughly \$500,000 deficit is due to the recent

hiring of staff members to work with students with disabilities and transportation costs as the school adds additional bus routes for new students, officials said. Enrollment increased this fall to about 355 students, according to an unofficial headcount, up from 285 last year after the school added sixth grade. But nearly a third of the school's students opted not to return this year. The challenges are not unusual

“Obviously we can't write a blank check to the direct-run school forever.”

OLIN PARKER, Orleans Parish School Board member

for a new school, but they have taken on greater significance as the Leah Chase School is the first permanent district-run school in New Orleans in nearly two decades.

The Orleans Parish School Board opened the school last fall on the theory that there was demand and a need for a traditional public school in the city's all-charter school system. But the school's early struggles are testing that theory and raising questions about whether the school can differentiate itself enough to compete with the city's 64 other public schools for students and become self-sustaining without the district

propping it up. “Obviously we can't write a blank check to the direct-run school forever,” board member Olin Parker said at a School Board meeting on Tuesday. After the board decided last year to run its own school, the district had to design and launch it on a short timeline. “When we opened the Leah

➤ See **SCHOOL**, page 6A

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HIGH 93
LOW 72
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