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THE NEW ORLEANS ADVOCATE

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Defense challenges new evidence

Lawyers for Cantrell, Vappie say claims a 'figment of imagination'

BY JAMES FINN
 Staff writer

Attorneys for former Mayor LaToya Cantrell and her longtime police bodyguard are fighting a bid by federal prosecutors to lodge fresh evidence at their looming fraud trial, with one lawyer saying the new material resembles "a figment of a prosecutor's imagination."

Last month, the U.S. Attorney's Office asked to tell the jury about two new buckets of evidence that are not directly linked to the pair's criminal charges. They include how Cantrell spent campaign



Cantrell



Vappie

dollars on alcohol and clothes, then fudged purchase records; and how her New Orleans Police Department bodyguard and alleged paramour, Jeffrey Vappie, gifted her a pair of gold rings he is accused of hiding from

the grand jury.

The new acts are unrelated to formal charges of wire fraud, obstruction and conspiracy the defendants face under the grand jury indictment returned in August, which accused them of spending taxpayer dollars on a series of romantic getaways, plus an associated cover-up.

Prosecutors, however, contend

the fresh material shows they operated by a modus operandi: a repeated tendency to hide evidence of their alleged wrongdoing. Judges can allow juries to weigh such evidence when they determine it is not overly prejudicial, though legal scholars say they tread carefully in doing so.

In a pair of blistering filings that hint at potential strategies for the planned October trial, lawyers for

► See **EVIDENCE**, page 8A



STAFF PHOTO BY SOPHIA GERMER

Clerk of Court Chelsey Richard Napoleon speaks during a Thursday news conference at the Orleans Criminal District Court building in New Orleans.

Civil clerk sues mayor, City Council over move to oust her

Battle over new combined post heats up

BY MATT BRUCE
 Staff writer

A day after the New Orleans City Council appointed an interim clerk for the Orleans Parish courts and called a special election to fill the seat, the person the state Legislature installed in the

post last week lodged a lawsuit to stop the moves.

The suit filed Tuesday in Baton Rouge by Chelsey Napoleon, the longtime Civil District Court clerk who took over the duties of the criminal clerk earlier this month, names city leaders as defendants and claims they lacked the authority to undercut her lawful claim to a unified clerk's office

Judge Tarvald Smith of the 19th Judicial District set a hearing for Monday as

Napoleon aims to halt the city's actions, the latest volley in an intensifying legal battle that began April 30 when Gov. Jeff Landry signed Senate Bill 256 into law.

The act merged the clerks' offices for Orleans Parish's civil and criminal courts and abolished the criminal clerk seat won last fall by former Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola prisoner turned attorney Calvin Duncan.

► See **CLERK**, page 8A

State Police to pay \$4.8M in motorist's 2019 death

Ronald Greene fatally beaten after traffic stop

BY JOHN SIMERMAN, ANDREA GALLO
 and JAMES FINN
 Staff writers

Almost seven years to the day after the death of Ronald Greene during an arrest by Louisiana State Police, the agency agreed Tuesday to pay \$4.8 million to settle a wrongful death case, said a source familiar with the negotiations.

Police body camera videos of Greene's death prompted federal investigations, state legislative inquiries and charges against some of the troopers involved. The videos showed a group of White troopers beating and dragging Greene, who was Black, as he cried out: "I'm scared!"

Tuesday's settlement stemmed from a federal civil complaint Greene's family initially filed in 2020, the year after his death. The petition was paused for several years as the U.S. Department of Justice weighed bringing federal criminal charges against troopers and while a bevy of other investigations into his death unfolded.

But other state and federal probes sputtered, and the family reopened the lawsuit in February of last year.

Five troopers and a Union Parish Sheriff's Office deputy were named as defendants in the family's civil complaint.

► See **POLICE**, page 11A

Carbon capture becomes key issue in race for U.S. Senate

Trump has thus far dominated election

BY TYLER BRIDGES
 Staff writer

In a campaign that has focused more on President Donald Trump than the issues, government regulation of carbon capture and se-

questration has emerged as a key fault line in Saturday's Senate primary.

State Treasurer John Fleming has made his forceful opposition to the new process a key driver of his campaign, saying it threatens to poison waterways and strip landowners of property rights.

That has made him the target of attack ads broadcast by two out-



side groups associated with Gov. Jeff Landry and financed at least in part by oil and gas companies that want to inject the carbon dioxide deep in underground wells.

Fleming has counterattacked by saying that U.S. Rep. Julia Letlow,

who has Landry's support, actually supports the industry because her fiancé, Kevin Ainsworth, is a major lobbyist for carbon capture and sequestration companies in Baton Rouge.

Letlow has called that accusation "a low blow."

Letlow has said she favors letting local communities decide whether to allow the process.

"If a project is not safe, if it's not transparent and if it does not have community buy-in, it should not move forward," she said in a radio debate May 5.

But in a separate interview, Letlow refused to be pinned down on how a community would decide to give a green light.

► See **CARBON**, page 7A

WEATHER
HIGH 85
LOW 65
 PAGE 6C



Business **10A** Commentary **7B** Nation-World **2A**
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