



JP MORRELL
COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

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New Orleans City Council

March 10, 2025

Gilbert Montaña
Chief Administrative Officer
1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Romy Samuel
Director of Finance
1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Mr. Montaña and Ms. Samuel,

I write to express my dismay and extreme concern at the March 9 press release announcing Mayor LaToya Cantrell's attendance at this week's Mayor's College Conference in Washington D.C. "to interact" with other leaders and "share best practices related to challenges facing metropolitan areas across America."

On February 27, the Council adopted Ordinance Cal. No. 34,984 (the "Travel Moratorium") temporarily banning precisely this kind of non-essential travel and the incurrence of non-essential-travel-related expenses. This legislation—which the Mayor did not veto and, therefore, became law yesterday at noon—was adopted to address claims by you and other members of the administration that spending was out of control.

It is legally irrelevant that the Mayor's latest lark was announced before the Travel Moratorium took effect. The law clearly prohibits employees both from "engag[ing] in non-essential travel" and "incur[ing] any non-essential-travel-related expense" between March 9 and April 30. So, even if the expenses were approved, the act of travel itself is also prohibited. This interpretation is underscored by Section 1(f) of the Travel Moratorium, which contemplates reimbursement for travel expenses already incurred when travel must be cancelled because of the ban. If pre-approved or pre-paid travel was exempt from the ordinance, then this provision would not be necessary.

As public officials, each of you has an independent legal duty to faithfully uphold and enforce the law—even in the face of other high-ranking officers who would ignore it. I therefore request that no city funds be used to reimburse Mayor Cantrell or any member of her traveling retinue for any expenses or credit card charges, including per diem allowances, incurred in connection with this patently unlawful trip.

I am also making a formal and continuing request that you provide the Council a statement of any additional expenses incurred by the Mayor or her team in connection with this trip, a statement of any reimbursements paid, and a list of the employees involved in approving and facilitating these reimbursements.

Given the administration's claims that the City is headed for a potential fiscal crisis, it is simply beyond the pale that the Mayor would ignore an ordinance designed to address the fiscal crisis

that prompted her to withhold funding from Orleans Parish schoolchildren. If the Mayor seeks to learn about “best practices” in leadership, she might begin with “obeying the law” and with “leading by example through self-sacrifice and financial discipline.” Neither lesson requires a trip to Washington at taxpayer expense.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JP Morrell', is displayed within a light gray rectangular box.

JP Morrell
City Council President

Cc: All Councilmembers
Hon. Donesia Turner, City Attorney