

Bush to discuss economics today at Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce

October 20, 2008
The Town Talk

President Bush will step foot in downtown Alexandria today for the first time during his nearly eight years in the Oval Office.

While Bush has flown into England Airpark before, the 43rd president has never ventured down I-49 and into the city's main hub.

This will all change, however, after he emerges from Air Force One and into a meeting with local bankers and business people at the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce. White House personnel have described the meeting as Bush's way of gauging how the nation's economic crisis is impacting America's "Main Streets."

It follows the president's Friday meeting with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, also on the economic crisis.

"Since the beginning of the financial crisis, the president and his economic team have worked to stabilize the financial system," said Blair Jones, a White House spokesman. "In addition, the president has been traveling around the country to talk directly with the American people about these important issues."

But why Alexandria's Main Street?

There are at least two reasons for Bush picking Alexandria: an invitation and a unique economy.

U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, is involved in the first reason.

"Congressman Alexander invited the president to visit the region ... and the president has traveled around the country to communities, local Main Street communities, like Alexandria," Jones said. "This trip is part of that ongoing effort."

Alexander gave a similar reason to Blair's.

"This (meeting) is about providing jobs and economic growth," Alexander said.

The Congressman said did not believe the trip had anything to do with the upcoming elections, including the hotly contested Senate race between Sen. Mary Landrieu and Republican challenger John Kennedy.

"I don't even know if John Kennedy knows (Bush) is coming or Sen. Landrieu, either one. ... It's nothing about electing anybody or re-electing anybody," Alexander said.

As for the Central Louisiana economy, it is one that deals with the state's special and varied industries, like agriculture and energy.

"In areas like Central Louisiana and North Louisiana, (the economies) are unique," said Adam Sharp, a spokesman for Landrieu. "The president, particularly when he comes to Louisiana, tends to go to New Orleans.

Or, possibly, I think he's been to Baton Rouge, once or twice. But usually when these national figures come in they go to New Orleans and they'll look at the broader picture."

By coming to Cenla, Bush will gain insight on the area's agricultural economy, which was trounced by the recent hurricanes, Sharp said.

"The economic crisis in Louisiana is not exactly the same as the rest of the country. Louisiana has had one of the lowest rates of subprime mortgages in the country," Sharp said.

For Aaron Baer of the Republican Party of Louisiana, the trip and its location are both focused on the economy.

The president's main intent will be to hear how "real people" are being impacted by the national economic crisis, Baer said.

"He doesn't want to talk to Wall Street."