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House panels OKs renaming I-110 for activist

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The House Transportation Committee approved a Senate-passed proposal Monday to name Interstate 110 in Baton Rouge after slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in spite of opposition from several groups Monday that raised questions about King’s character and morals.

“I would suggest that it would be about as appropriate to name I-110 Jane Fonda Freeway or Abbie Hoffman Highway or even Benedict Arnold Boulevard,” Baba Wilson of the Taxpayer Education Association of Louisiana told the House Transportation Committee.

Daniel Street, an LSU student representing the Louisiana Coalition for Conservatism, called King a “blasphemer and adulterer” who allegedly consorted with prostitutes the night before his murder.

Street also said that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was so alarmed at King’s associations with Communists that Hoover had the civil rights leader placed under surveillance.

Street alleged that there is strong evidence that King himself may have been a Communist, but noted Congress has closed King’s FBI file until the year 2027.

Finally, Street said, a class at Stanford University discovered more than 27 instances of plagiarism in a dissertation written by King.

“In short, Martin Luther King was a literary thief,” Street said.

Duncan Walker from the National Association for the Advancement of White People also attacked King, claiming that his reputation as a womanizer was “an embarrassment and a direct insult to all women and the family unit.”

State Rep. Raymond Jetson, D-Baton Rouge, defended King against the detractors, emphasizing that the civil rights leader deserved to have a street named after him.

“Even though Martin Luther King was a man and had the failings of man and found himself falling short of the glory of God, let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” Jetson said.

“In spite of all of his shortcomings, here was a man who changed this country, who changed this world,”

State Sen. Cleo Fields, D-Baton Rouge, said more than 5,000 streets around the country already are named after King. He said Baton Rouge is the only major metropolitan area in Louisiana without a street named after King — and noted that the mayor and the Metro Council have approved the naming of I-110.

Fields proposal, SB12, will add the name “Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Expressway” to the stretch of interstate between Southern University and I-10, but will not replace the “I-110” signs that are currently in place.

“Fields’ bill passed by an 8-1 vote and now goes to the full House for consideration.”

Committee members voting in favor of the SB12 were Reps. Rodney Alexander, Eugene Eason, Noble Ellington, Buster Guzzardo, Raymond Jetson, Raymond Lalonde, Victor Stelly, and Sam Theriot. Those opposing Fields’ measure were Reps. John Glover and Donald Ray Kennerd.