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## NEWSMAKER MEETINGS

*Pharmacy Board readies next weed license,  
Joint Budget to address contract drama*

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The final committee and board meetings of the calendar year, slated for next week in Capitoland, won't disappoint.

In particular, the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget and the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy are both expected to make decisions that will shape important policy issues in 2023.

For its part, the Pharmacy Board will hold a two-day meeting next week to award the latest medical marijuana dispensary license in the greater New Orleans region — and the competition is as fierce as it is well-connected.

Members of Joint Budget, meanwhile, will also tackle a controversy involving prescription drug costs and a multi-billion dollar contract. The dispute gave way to a lawsuit last week that has so far entangled the Legislature, the Edwards Administration, CaremarkPCS Health, the state's independent pharmacists and (most recently) Attorney General **Jeff Landry**.

To learn more about all of next week's meetings, from times and locations to agendas, visit [www.Legis.La.Gov](http://www.Legis.La.Gov).

**WEED LICENSE UP FOR GRABS**

A subcommittee of the state Pharmacy Board has recommended seven applicants for the state's only available medical marijuana pharmacy permit.

Each of the seven companies from the greater New Orleans region will be interviewed by the full board Wednesday, with a final decision to come as early as Thursday afternoon.

In all, 28 companies applied for the state's 10th pharmacy permit, but that list was narrowed down to the following:

- Bee's Apothecary and Wellness (owned by pharmacist **Bobbi Crouch** and attorney **Robert Lucky**)
- Carr Botanicals (lobbyist **Nick Cahanin** of the Picard Group is an owner)
- Crescent City Therapeutics (Former Judge **Freddie Pitcher** and pharmacist **Lovie Rodgers** are attached)
- Medicinal Arts Pharmacy of New Orleans (Louisiana Democratic Party Chair **Katie Bernhardt** is a co-owner)
- ReLeaf Medicinal Dispensary of New Orleans
- Salus Wellness of Westwego (Saints legend **Steve Gleason** is a part-owner)
- West Bank Pharmacy of Belle Chasse (Co-owners include attorney **James M. Williams**, the former king of Washington Mardi Gras and a member of the LSU Board of Supervisors, and river pilot Capt. **Lee Jackson**)

While these companies will be interviewed Wednesday, a board spokesperson said another seven applicants that were not recommended have requested to be interviewed as well and they will receive that courtesy on Thursday. (Those seven other applicants are listed on the [Pharmacy Board's agenda](#).)

Once Thursday's interviews are complete, the board will enter into executive session for deliberations before moving back into open session to presumably make a final decision via a public motion.

At least that's the plan. Those involved with the process say board members could always vote to take more time on the decision, but as of this morning that's not expected.

**ANOTHER BATTLE OF THE BRANCHES**

Attorney General **Jeff Landry** filed a petition Wednesday to intervene in a lawsuit brought by the Louisiana Independent Pharmacies Association against the Edwards Administration.

LIPA wants to cancel a \$2 billion contract the Division of Administration approved between the Office of Group Benefits and CaremarkPCS Health to manage prescription drug services for thousands of state employees and retirees.

After hearing complaints about high costs to the state and low reimbursements for pharmacists, members of Joint Budget originally rejected the OGB contract.

Commissioner of Administration **Jay Dardenne**, however, told lawmakers the Division would move forward with the contract based on a recent court order.

Time is also an issue, Dardenne added, since the current OGB contract for prescription benefits ends Dec. 31.

Now the 19th Judicial District Court is being asked to weigh in on whether the Division requires approval from Joint Budget for these kinds of contracts, as required by law.

That broader question needs to be fully answered, said Appropriations Chair **Zee Zeringue**. "Sometimes it takes litigation to confirm or clarify an issue," said Zeringue, "and, unfortunately, it has come to that. Lawmakers obviously believe the Division needs Joint Budget approval."

According to Landry's petition with the 19th JDC, the attorney general seems to agree: "An administrative agency of state government cannot dispense with the Legislature's prerogative with respect to the expenditure of state funds by imperial edict."

When the Joint Budget Committee meets next on Thursday, members will discuss the formation of a new subcommittee to look at alternative paths forward with the administration, Zeringue said.

"There might be some different ways we can approach this issue," the chairman said. "That's part of what we're going to discuss next week."

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## Insurance Race Speculation

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According to sources in the state Insurance Department, incumbent Commissioner **Jim Donelon** may be leaning against running for re-election.

Donelon, who had a fundraiser earlier this week at Juban's in Baton Rouge, is facing growing criticism for a tattered industry. (For instance, nearly two dozen insurers have left the state or gone insolvent since 2020, the latest — and largest — being United Property and Casualty Insurance Company, which announced plans to exit the Louisiana marketplace this week.)

Should Donelon, who turns 78 on Wednesday, actually retire, there's a quiet buzz building around the possibility of a bid from **Ron Henderson**, the deputy commissioner of the Office of Consumer Advocacy and Diversity.

Already announced and staffed up is former C100 Chair **Tim Temple**, an insurance executive who lost to Donelon in the 2019 primary by 82,500 votes, or 53 to 47 percent.

For months Temple has worked to turn the 2023 race into a referendum on Donelon's leadership, a mission made easier by recent hurricanes and floods. Communities all along the coast are fed up with the challenges of filing and getting their claims, and this statewide race is the perfect vessel for that angst.

Temple is laser-focused on this election and will be a competitive candidate whether Donelon runs or not. A quick review of his latest campaign finance report reveals names every statewide candidate wants to see, like GOP super-donor **Boysie Bollinger**.

Former Sen. **Ryan Gatti** of Bossier City is also considering the race for insurance commissioner, but has not yet made a final decision.

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# *LaPolitics Q&A:*

## **Gordon Reese**

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**LaPolitics: The scale of legislation being moved on the state and federal levels has given rise to bigger budgets for issues advocacy. From the outside looking in, it rarely seems like these policy campaigns have much of a runway and they're often shorter in duration than other non-legislative issues campaigns. Is that generally the case, and if so, can you still have a data-driven approach that allows for tweaking and adjustments?**

**Gordon Reese**, vice president of Innovative Politics: In today's fast-paced climate, it's critical to get the message right out the gate. Once a bill is filed, you better have plans in place to launch immediately. Our clients expect a business like approach to planning, research and rollout. The short runways we face today aren't just legislative, but they're driven by social media and a news cycle you can quickly lose control of if you're not ready to roll. Most of our clients establish policy goals months or even years in advance. We find that issue advocacy campaigns are most successful when a firm like ours has engaged with the stakeholders and government relations teams before the legislative session even begins. Our team uses that time to learn all about issue, draft messaging and test the most persuasive messages for the right target audience. Our goal is often to take potentially wonky issues and make them understandable and relatable to voters, influencers and legislators.

**A few general consultants and campaign managers have mentioned to me lately how the campaigns they worked on this year — more than ever — felt like content generators. There were social media platforms, video channels, traditional press appeals and everything else that fueled our media consumption. Do you get the same feed-the-beast vibes from your independent expenditure work?**

Campaigns and issue campaigns are not the same. Candidate campaigns teams often get drawn into micro-battles on social media, which leads to waves of content creation that distract from the main message. And while content might be king on social media, quality and discipline messaging matters. Most of our Independent Expenditure groups want to engage with the general public in a more focused manner that drives a specific result that goes beyond just public

opinion. Our clients are laser-focused on delivering the most impactful messages to the specific voters that need to be persuaded or motivated into action. It's important for both candidate and IE campaigns to keep a sense of the pulse of what voters and grass tops leaders are saying on social media. We leverage sentiment tracking programs that help aggregate and analyze all the content in the digital space. But that data is only part of the equation and needs to be integrated into more sophisticated quantitative and qualitative research analysis.

**Let's try and define IE, or independent expenditure work. When you're doing IE in a race, who's the client? Is it usually just a PAC or a nonprofit outfit? Are there other categories of IE worth defining?**

Our independent expenditure (IE) clients are usually a group of like-minded interested organizations, foundations or people who believe that if the general public had all the facts about a certain issue (or candidate), the public would be more likely to agree with their position. Sometimes these IE groups support or oppose a particular candidate, but other times the group is focused on specific legislation, a local ballot issue or a referendum. Today, we're seeing a growing number of "patriots" who care deeply about the future of their state or community and are willing to invest and contribute to making a positive impact. Often, we see national groups working hand in hand with Louisiana stakeholders. That is when great things happen. In Louisiana, over the last 10 years, we have been a part of substantial IE efforts such as passing substantial education reforms that help children escape failing schools. Let's face it... Louisiana has a lot of room for policy improvements and if we can combine the expertise of national policy leaders with the passion of local donors then we can accomplish big things for our state.

**You also work quite a bit in the proximity of the Louisiana Legislature. Do you think this upcoming regular session will be packed with election year issues, or have all of the major wedge issues (like transgender athletes) already played out?**

As you know, this fiscal session will limit the amount of "major wedge issue" bills to at most five per legislator. But in the current polarized political climate, with the election looming, you can rest assured there will still be plenty of legislation that grabs attention. But I would be surprised if the most controversial issues make it through both chambers in this upcoming session, as the body and its leaders are typically less willing to lean on members in an election year to make any vote that could be considered risky to their political future.

**What kind of themes can we expect to hear in legislative races next year?**

In general, voters are frustrated with the current political climate, so the "political outsider" brand continues to be as strong as ever. Most families are worried about the cost of living issues, and the closer you live to a city, the more likely you are to be concerned about rising crime and general lawlessness. Economic development is an issue that speaks to so many in our state because of the growing outmigration problem. But quality of life issues like drainage, coastal erosion and hurricane protection will always loom large. Every Louisiana voter is furious with insurance companies for raising rates and poor service. So, I would expect to see movement around these issues.

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## Field Notes

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- **BIG REMINDER:** Election Day is tomorrow. ([Click here](#) to review the LaPolitics' ballot guide that was published in last week's issue.)
- **LAST-MINUTE NOD:** Incumbent PSC Commissioner **Lambert Boissiere**, facing a tough re-election battle ahead of tomorrow's runoff, is pulling out the "big guns: an ad cut by Gov. **John Bel Edwards**," [reports @SamKarlin](#).
- **REC & BUDGET PREP:** Via PAR's [@MelindaDeslatte](#): "Louisiana's Revenue Estimating Conference is meeting next Thursday (Dec. 15) to update the income forecast and set the official forecast for the next budget year. That will be the basis for development of Gov. **John Bel Edwards**' budget proposal due to lawmakers in February."
- **ANNOUNCED:** As previously reported in *LaPolitics*, Ascension Parish businessman **Brandon Trosclair** is running for secretary of state as a Trump Republican. [Now he's officially announced](#).
- **HIRED:** Ochsner has hired **Kristy Nichols** as its new system vice president of government relations and public policy.
- **AWARDED:** Via House Majority Leader **Blake Miguez**, while in Thailand: "I placed fifth overall in the world and my U.S. shooting team is coming home with silver medals." You may recall Miguez gave us a preview of the global competition in a September interview with *LaPolitics*: "I will be competing on the Men's U.S. Shooting Team at the World Shoot competition later this year. I expect over 2,500 competitors from 125 different countries to be in attendance Thailand is actually a close second in distance to Bali, Indonesia, where I won a silver medal years ago. I'm excited about competing again and will be bringing

my own firearms and ammunition to the competition. Our U.S. Shooting Team intends to bring home medals again this year.” It appears they did just that.

- **PUBLISHING NOTE:** Next week’s issues of *The Tracker* and *LaPolitics Weekly* will be the last of the calendar year.
- **STILL NEED GIFTS?:** Gift subscriptions and bulk subscriptions to Louisiana’s oldest political trade publication are now available! For the past 30 years, *LaPolitics Weekly* has brought subscribers the best (and the worst) from the world of Louisiana politics — from polls and profiles to exclusive scoops and fundraising news. For a special holiday discount, send your requests for gift subscriptions and bulk subscriptions to [JJA@LaPolitics.com](mailto:JJA@LaPolitics.com) or call 225-772-2518. You can also purchase an individual subscription instantly at [www.LaPoliticsWeekly.com](http://www.LaPoliticsWeekly.com). (Subscriptions not your thing? Try a book on Louisiana politics! Use the contact information above to inquire about copies of *The Party Is Over*, *The Last Constitution*, *Long Shot*, *Cross to Bear* or *The Last Hayride*.)

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## News You Can Use

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- Campaigns & Elections: FEC Finally Comes Up With Rules for Digital Disclaimers
- Governing: More States Offer Health Coverage to Immigrant Children
- OS: Biden administration approved offshore oil project following company’s lobbying push
- NCSL: State Fiscal Conditions Are Strong, but Uncertainty Looms
- The Advocate: A 'wild' Shreveport election ends Saturday when **Greg Tarver** or **Tom Arceneaux** will be mayor
- The Advocate: DOTD chief sets up exploratory committee as he considers bid for governor
- Illuminator: Anti-censorship group in St. Tammany seeks to join frontlines in library battles
- Illuminator: Louisiana medical board’s marijuana stance prompts threats from senators



- WVLA: Another insurance company leaving Louisiana. Here's what policyholders should do next

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## PAST IS PROLOGUE

# A Grand Old Convention

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This week's history feature dips into the archives of "Louisiana: The State We're In" to uncover a memorable political event that's now 34-years-old.

This episode from Aug. 19, 1988, features special coverage from **Ken Lormand** and **Roger Sockman** of that year's Republican National Convention in New Orleans.

The coverage includes a history of the Republican Party in Louisiana and an overview of the impact of President **Ronald Reagan's** two terms in office had on Louisiana.

This episode also includes Govs. **Buddy Roemer** and **Dave Treen**; **Billy Nungesser Sr.**, then the chairman of the Louisiana Republican Party; Dr. **Mark Carleton** of Louisiana State University; Lt. Gov. **Paul Hardy**; Congressmen **Richard Baker** and **Bob Livingston**; and many others...

## WATCH THE EPISODE

***The Louisiana Restaurant Association was formed in 1946 and serves its members by advancing and protecting Louisiana's restaurant and foodservice industry.***

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## They Said It

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"I asked Mike (Huval) if he ever dreamed growing up in Cecilia, Louisiana, that he would one day talk to the president of France. He said, 'I didn't think I would ever talk to my police juror.'"

—*Speaker Pro Tem **Tanner Magee**, reflecting on the recent Louisiana visit made by French President Emmanuel Macron, via Twitter*

"Anything is fair game when you run for office."

—*Attorney **Bob Ellis**, who operates the One Hundred Percent super PAC, in The Advocate*

"...I don't have any questions about Tom's integrity or his qualifications. I don't feel that way about Greg."

—*Shreveport Mayor **Adrian Perkins**, who lost his bid in the primary, on the runoff candidates to replace him, in The Advocate*

"That's not a threat — that's a promise."

—*Sen. **Jay Luneau**, "suggesting LSBME members would face consequences if they continue to thwart the laws of Louisiana," in regard to patient access to medical marijuana, in The Illuminator*

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## THE END.

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