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LEGISLATURE

2026

Governor's agenda for session looks lighter this year

BY TYLER BRIDGES
Staff writer

Gov. Jeff Landry rode herd on fellow Republicans in the state Legislature during two regular sessions and four special sessions in 2024 and 2025.

The results, to name a few: Harsher prison terms. Lower income tax rates but higher sales taxes. Weaker antipollution regulations for chemical plants as a means to boost investment. Tighter controls on lawsuits filed by people claiming injuries in auto accidents. A copy of the Ten Commandments in each classroom.

In the three-month regular session that begins Monday, however, all evidence indicates that Landry has limited ambitions for the legislature this year.

One sign: Landry has said little about his agenda and only recently sat down with the legislative leadership to outline his plans.

Another sign: Landry has not followed the traditional practice of governors, Democrats and Republicans alike, of building support for his agenda by meeting with civic leaders and reporters during the preceding weeks in each of the state's media markets.

Landry's office declined to comment, saying the governor would lay out his agenda during his speech on the first day the legislature meets.

"It will be a mild session," said Bernie Pinsonat, a veteran pollster and political consultant. "It will be a lot of ho-hum stuff, like fixing local problems. They have stuff they don't want to do — like carbon capture. They'll kill those bills. The governor feels like he's done enough on insurance. I don't expect any big policy fights."

One reason, Republican legislators said, is that they have done so much to shift Louisiana to the right after eight years of being stymied by a Democratic governor, John Bel Edwards.

"We've done so many things in the last 24 months," said House Speaker Phillip DeVillier, R-Eunice. "It's good to take a step back



INSIDE

► Likely top issues of this legislative session, **Page 4**

► Our opinions team breaks down what they expect to see, **Page 5**

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► See **SESSION**, page 3R



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Gov. Jeff Landry

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2026 LEGISLATURE
WHAT TO EXPECT

SESSION

Continued from page 1R

and see which policies are working.”

Another reason why Landry has a lighter agenda, lawmakers and political analysts added, is that the governor wants to stay out of political fights that would further sap his popularity. He is already facing criticism for being very vocal late last year about who ought to coach LSU football and run the university's athletic department, and more recently for serving as President Donald Trump's special envoy in his efforts to seize Greenland. Some lawmakers say constituents are asking whether the governor is focused on their needs.

Expect the unexpected

To be sure, an unexpected issue could always flare up, particularly on race.

Last year, far-right conservatives pushed an anti-DEI bill through the House that Black Democrats called “offensive, “divisive” and “racially charged.”

The Senate Republican leadership, acting at the behest of their Democratic colleagues, killed the bill by not giving it a hearing.

Lawmakers are also awaiting a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court on whether the current six congressional districts are legal.

Senate President Cameron Henry, R-Metairie, noted that several legislators have filed redistricting bills in case the high court invalidates the current map before the legislative session ends on June 1.

The issue could be “contentious,” Henry said.

Republican legislators have said they would want to draw a new map to flip a Democratic congressional seat to Republicans.

Last year, the hottest topic was the push by business interests and insurance companies to make changes, over the objections of Democrats and trial lawyers, that sought to reduce lawsuits and payouts to people injured in car accidents. Landry predicted the various bills approved by lawmakers would reduce insurance rates by as much as 10%.

DeVillier and Henry predicted only minor modifications this year to give them time to determine how last year's changes will affect people.

DeVillier said he expected that lawmakers would double the funding available for the popular fortified roof program to \$30 million.

One sign of the lower temperature on insurance issues: Insurance Commissioner Tim Temple said he and Landry recently met to discuss the measures passed during the past two years and the impact on premiums.

Just before last year's session, Temple complained that he hadn't been able to get Landry to talk with him for 11 months.

Legislators said they welcome the lighter agenda this year, describing themselves as worn out by the governor's forceful style and from the constant need to be in Baton Rouge. They note privately that serving as a legislator is supposed to be a part-time job, and the pay hasn't been raised since 1980.

Local issues

One issue that will generate plenty of fire is the push by local residents against injecting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases deep underground in a process known as carbon capture sequestration. Residents near many sites of proposed carbon capture wells are increasingly concerned that the activity will pollute water and rural lands.

“There's a lot of pressure from the public, more so than last year,” said Rep.



Speaker of the House Phillip DeVillier, R-Eunice, left, and Senate President Cameron Henry, R-Metairie, speak in the Louisiana House of Representatives on the opening day of the 2024 legislative special session in Baton Rouge.



Rep. Brett Geymann, R-Lake Charles, chairs the House Natural Resources Committee, which will hear the anti-carbon capture bills.

THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Legislature will convene at noon on Monday. Final adjournment is no later than 6 p.m. on Monday, June 1.

Brett Geymann, R-Lake Charles. “Each time a project potentially locates in an area, that area gets activated. There's also pressure from the other side not to do anything. It will be very interesting to see how things play out in the committee.”

Geymann chairs the House Natural Resources Committee, which will hear the anti-carbon capture bills.

State Rep. Mike Johnson, R-Pineville, who is the speaker pro tempore, is expected to take the lead in giving voice to those local concerns, which are especially prevalent in such parishes as Beauregard, Livingston, Allen and Rapides.

House Bill 7 by Johnson would prohibit companies from using eminent domain laws to take private property for carbon capture projects.

“Our constitution says you can only expropriate private property for a public necessity, such as schools, highways, drainage, electricity lines,” Johnson said. “Carbon capture is solely for a private profit.”

Under his bill, Johnson added, “You have to negotiate if someone is willing to sell it. It's not anti-industry.”

Johnson is also sponsor-

ing House Bill 5, which would allow parish governments or the voters in that parish to block the authorization of permits for carbon capture there.

“If the population of a parish doesn't want the carbon capture industry, it's not good for the parish or the industry to operate there,” Johnson said.

Will Green, president and chief executive officer of

the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, said his organization, which has long wielded power in Baton Rouge, will oppose the efforts of Johnson and others to stop carbon capture projects.

“If we fumble that ball, Texas will pick it up,” Green said. “Mississippi will pick it up. Florida will pick it up.”

Budget questions

Henry seems to have settled the biggest educational issue by saying senators won't support Landry's request to double the cost of LA GATOR, the program that allows children to attend private schools with taxpayers' money. It's too expensive, Henry said.

He said his focus will be on keeping spending down, given the budget challenges ahead. Lawmakers will be approving the budget for fiscal year 2026-27, which begins on July 1.

Jan Moller, director of Invest in Louisiana, a progressive-leaning budget advocacy group noted that state budget officials are forecasting a \$329 million shortfall in fiscal year 2027-28, a \$614 million shortfall in fiscal year 2028-29 and a \$977 million shortfall in fis-

cal year 2029-30. Meanwhile, Landry, DeVillier and Henry have all expressed interest in a special session late this year to further reduce the state income tax rate.

Moller questions if this is possible, especially since a half-cent sales tax increase approved by legislators in 2024 is scheduled to expire in 2030.

'Affordability' agenda

Because Republicans hold a two-thirds majority in both the House and the Senate, Democrats have limited influence.



Kyle Green Jr.

will be an “affordability” agenda that aims to raise the \$ 7.25-per-hour minimum wage and reduce the pay equity gap faced by women.

Republicans have shown little appetite for these measures.

Louisiana Progress is

pushing to make small but significant changes for cash-strapped people, including lower fines for those who let their car insurance lapse, tighter controls on businesses that impose hidden fees on purchases and easier ways for people to cancel online subscriptions.

“The costs for almost every aspect of daily life — food, health care, consumer goods, housing, insurance — are going up, and wages are largely failing to keep pace,” said Peter Brown, the executive director of Louisiana Progress.



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HOT TOPICS

When the Louisiana Legislature convenes on Monday, it will consider hundreds of bills covering all sorts of issues that affect the state.

Based on interviews with legislative leaders and a review of pre-filed legislation, these issues are likely to see the most attention — and potentially the most intense debates.

GETTY PHOTO

COMPILED BY MATTHEW ALBRIGHT, ALYSE PFEIL, MEGHAN FRIEDMANN and DAVID MITCHELL | Staff writers

CARBON CAPTURE

After the legislature last year put some new limits on carbon capture and sequestration, some lawmakers want to try again this year to limit the controversial technology and give local governments or voters the right to reject it. Industry opposed similar bills last year over fears that patchwork regulations would hinder the burgeoning technology and endanger billions of dollars in capital investment to the state. But Rep. Mike Johnson, R-Pineville, and Sen. Bill Wheat Jr., R-Ponchatoula, are back with new attempts at bringing the question to the people

or their local elected officials. Other bills are seeking to bar pipeline companies' ability to expropriate land for new carbon dioxide delivery pipelines. And some legislators want to block carbon capture in Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain and three state wildlife management areas near them. Carbon capture and sequestration is the process of permanently injecting climate change-inducing gases underground. Industry supporters say the technology is safe, with five decades of analogous use in oil drilling, and provides a key to continuing Louisiana's fossil

fuel-based industries while mitigating climate change. Once seen as a relatively low-key environmental issue that drew broad legislative support in a state traditionally friendly to oil and gas, the technology has riled conservative rural Louisiana as billions of dollars in storage and pipeline projects have begun to roll out in Louisiana's heartland. Last fall, Gov. Jeff Landry declared a moratorium on new project applications as the state considers more than 30 already in the queue and has fast-tracked six of them.



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

SCHOOL VOUCHER FUNDING

Gov. Jeff Landry is asking the legislature to almost double funding for LA GATOR, the state program that gives parents taxpayer money to pay for private school tuition or homeschooling. Landry's budget request would grow the program from \$43.5 million this year to a total of \$88 million. That could pay for another 4,000 to 5,000 students to participate; just under 5,600 received the money this school year. Last year, the state Senate rejected Landry's bid to boost funding for LA GATOR, his signature education program. And Senate President Cameron Henry, who has said he is concerned about the program's cost growing unsustainably, has again voiced skepticism this year. The governor and other supporters say LA GATOR gives parents more control over their students' education and helps get kids out of failing schools. The program had nearly 40,000 applicants for the current year. But skeptics worry the program will give money to parents who were going to send their children to private schools anyway. And others point out that, in the state's previous voucher program, participating students had lower test scores than public school students.



Henry

REDISTRICTING?

Looming over the session is the U.S. Supreme Court case Louisiana v. Callais. Louisiana has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn part of the Voting Rights Act that allows race to be used as a factor in drawing voting districts to remedy historical discrimination in the voting process. Any time between now and July, the Supreme

Court could issue a decision in that case. Should an opinion come down during the legislative session, there's a chance it will prompt the Legislature to redraw Louisiana's congressional map — a process that would almost certainly be deeply contentious and take center stage. In anticipation of a possible ruling, some state lawmakers have already filed bills that would allow them to redraw Louisiana's six

congressional districts this year. A new voting map could impact the number of Republicans Louisiana sends to Congress. Currently there are four Republican U.S. House members; that number could increase to either five or even six under a different map and would come at the expense of one or two seats now held by two Black Democrats. That math would also factor into which party controls Congress.



FILE PHOTO

PHARMACY BENEFIT MANAGERS, DRUG COSTS AND MORE

Rising prescription drug costs and the convoluted prescription drug supply chain are likely to again spark debate this year. Gov. Jeff Landry and some of his allies in the Legislature have lambasted pharmacy benefit managers, companies that act as "middlemen" that negotiate drug prices. Landry has accused the pharmacy benefit managers of artificially driving up prescription

drug costs to pad profits and of pushing smaller local pharmacists out of the market by giving better business terms to major drug retailers, like CVS. This year, one of Landry's legislative allies, state Rep. Mike Echols, R-Monroe, a fierce critic of pharmacy benefit managers and staunch ally of independent pharmacists, said he plans to back legislation that would prohibit benefit managers from owning their own retail pharmacies and do away with a cap on punitive damages for managers that manipulate the market.

BUDGET QUESTIONS

As a key part of the legislative session, lawmakers will need to balance various state needs to draw up Louisiana's budget for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. With the state prison population on the rise after the state passed a slew of 'tough-on-crime' laws in 2024, legislators will face pressure to increase the corrections budget. Corrections officials have asked for another \$82 million next year to accommodate rising costs. Meanwhile, the state is expected to have to pay another \$42 million to administer SNAP, the federal food stamp program, due to a provision of President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act. And in May, just before the session ends, Louisianans will head to the polls to vote on whether to make a teacher pay raise permanent. If they vote against it, the Legislature may have to find another way to come up with the funds, or teachers could lose the temporary stipends they have received over the past several years. But Senate President Cameron Henry thinks one of the biggest budget issues this year will be in higher education: the state will have what to do about universities that are perennially in the red, he said.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING AND PROGRAMS

Some legislators want to take a hard look at the structure and funding of Louisiana's university systems, as several state schools face declining enrollment and structural budget deficits. Some lawmakers argue the state's smaller institutions that are losing students and money need to scrutinize their operational costs and the kinds of programs they offer — particularly before asking the state for more money. They also want to take a close look at the Board of Regents, which sets statewide goals and policies for higher education. Rep. John Wyble, R-Franklinton, has sponsored a bill that would prohibit university boards from spending state money on degrees that the federal government considers "low earning outcome programs." Leaders of some higher education institutions have argued they are underfunded, making it difficult for them to compete. The scrutiny follows the merger of the University of New Orleans into the LSU System after years of budget woes. And it comes as the flagship LSU campus, where enrollment is booming, restructures in pursuit of a top-50 ranking for university research.



FILE PHOTO

WORKFORCE TRAINING

Gov. Jeff Landry and Louisiana's workforce agency want to put the state's workforce training program — and federal funding for those efforts — under one state board, rather than the current setup of 15 different regional boards. Louisiana Works Secretary Susie Schowen has said that, currently, federal workforce training dollars get funneled to the various boards, causing Louisiana's employers to navigate the policies of 15 different programs. The goal is to make workforce training services consistent across the state and to have more flexibility in allocating the federal workforce training money. The effort comes after the U.S. Department of Labor under President Donald Trump encouraged states to seek waivers of federal laws that block "innovation" in worker training programs.

HOMELESSNESS

Gov. Jeff Landry is backing a bill aimed at reducing homelessness across the state. Under the proposal, unauthorized camping on public property — sleeping in public spaces — would be a crime. The legislation would also set up ways to assist people who are homeless with addiction treatment, mental health treatment, and finding shelter, among others.

COMMENTARY



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY HILARY SCHEINUK

Gov. Jeff Landry addresses the Louisiana Legislature last year on opening day of legislative session at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES LEGISLATIVE SESSION

What to expect when the Legislature gavels in

As Louisiana lawmakers prepare to head back to the state Capitol March 9, columnists Stephanie Grace, Will Sutton, Quin Hillyer and Faimon Roberts sat down to talk about this year's regular legislative session and what are likely to be some of the biggest agenda items, as well as the obstacles to getting things done.



Stephanie Grace

Quin Hillyer

Will Sutton

Faimon Roberts

Grace: Let's start by talking about some issues we're all watching in the coming legislative session.

Roberts: I'm particularly interested in the fight over carbon capture, which pits some very Republican legislators in rural areas against the state's industrial establishment and pro-business legislators. This year, we have a number of bills that have been filed, probably the biggest one coming from Speaker Pro Tem Mike Johnson, a Republican from Pineville, who has filed a bill trying to give local governments control over whether carbon capture wells or pipelines are permitted within their parishes. This is similar to a bill from last year that did not make it out of committee, but that bill came from a rank-and-file legislator from Vernon Parish, Chuck Owen. So here come these bills again. They may not have great prospects in the Legislature, but the debate over carbon capture is simply not going away.

Grace: On the other side, these projects are important to the state's economic development efforts to attract some of these big businesses that we've been getting.

Roberts: Yes, industrial processes specifically. A couple of years ago, when the federal government gave Louisiana expedited permitting authority over carbon capture, state government was elated. But with the insurgency against carbon capture coming as it does from very Republican districts, there has been just a real pushback in some of these rural parishes where the carbon would be sequestered.

Grace: In an unusual alliance with environmentalists...

Roberts: I mean, the environmentalists must be just pinching themselves with delight to see their Republican neighbors now pushing back over things like property rights and potential for accidents, and what happens if the carbon seeps upward into water supplies or pollutes land and stuff like that.

Hillyer: I'm watching whether Gov. Jeff Landry, who has been known to really play hardball on other issues, is going to play hardball on his request for \$88 million for the LA GATOR scholarship program, when state Senate President Cameron Henry is dead set against giving any more than \$43.5 million.

It boggles my mind that you have a program that is similar to ones that have worked in other states, where it is generally seen as conservative policy, and you have a putatively conservative state Senate president who has 40,000 families wanting in and he is only willing to let 7,000 of them get the scholarships. To me, Henry's opposition makes no sense.

It also makes no sense to me that Landry would request the money to double the number of scholarships without actually fighting for it.

Grace: We know most of the people who are now getting these scholarships came from the old voucher program that was discontinued. So it's more keeping kids in these private schools, as opposed to allowing new kids to join.

Hillyer: The bad thing about opposing it is he's opposing the ability of less affluent children to start taking advantage of some of the options that current recipients are getting. And remember, this is not just a regular voucher program. You can use this to get all sorts of tutoring help, to get computers, to get lots of different things, so this could benefit people who are not in private schools right now who want to explore different options.

Roberts: Henry's objection seems to be based on two points. One, that once you expand it, it just keeps expanding. And the second is that he said he had not talked to other legislators for whom this is an important issue. And I'm wondering about the dynamic between the governor and the Legislature here. Can the governor make this an important enough issue for enough legislators that they'll back him on it?

Grace: One thing that's really interesting about watching Henry is that it's clear he has got his finger on the pulse of his members. We've seen that when he has opposed things Landry has wanted before.

Sutton: The conservative advocacy groups have been pushing really, really hard for this. It seems they have had an audience of one: Landry.

Hillyer: I would think the parents of 33,000 children who otherwise qualify, who are denied the opportunity, would speak up. I certainly think that they should speak up.

Colleges, universities face scrutiny

Sutton: I find it interesting that it seems like there's interest on behalf of some legislators to take a look at a revamp of higher education, and in particular looking at the University of New Orleans' troubles and saying "This can't happen again," and telling other universities that are state-funded — not at the levels that they think they should be — that something's got to change. This is a big warning flag, I think, for the institutions and their leaders, and also for the various boards of higher education that we have, because they're part of systems.

Do we need all of those leaders, all of the board members and large staffs, if we're not having enough cash on hand, and we're not seeing the results? And I would think that would be an easy case to make with voters.

Hillyer: I'm curious to see if there is a backlash against some of the fiefdom-building that the governor and his agents have been doing with the system. Right now, there's clearly a backlash among the LSU medical faculty. I don't know if that backlash will

reach the legislative session, but the faculty is up in arms about the letting go of [LSU Health Sciences Center Chancellor] Steve Nelson, who was very popular and had a lot of accomplishments. I think that might be the tip of the iceberg, because between the governor intervening in the LSU football coach thing and being heavy-handed with regard to UNO, this is just something to watch.

Grace: And the LSU president search.

Roberts: This has been politically toxic, but we do need to reconsider our higher education system. What's approaching for colleges and universities, and they're all aware of this, is the upcoming demographic cliff. The fact is, there are just going to be fewer high school seniors for the foreseeable future. That means each college is in greater competition for each applicant. And it's true, the state just can't keep funding them to the same level if they're not serving the public like they once did.

Grace: You're right, this has come up over the years, but not to where change happens. It's because it goes through the Legislature, and these institutions are in members' districts, and it's often the biggest thing in a district, the biggest employer. So legislators really fight to protect the college or university in their district.

Another issue I am always looking at is property insurance. We've had some really big legislation in recent years. We saw a lot of reforms that Insurance Commissioner Tim Temple wanted that were kind of free market, with the idea being that if you reduce some regulations and burdens on insurers, more of them will come.

But not a lot of people really are seeing much relief. So this year, as we're waiting to see if some of these "reforms" start working, what people seem really focused on is the one change that has had an effect so far, which is helping people get fortified roofs on their homes. It can have a real effect on the cost of their insurance, and also on homeowners' ability to stay in their homes after a disaster.

People are really bought in. Even Temple, who was maybe a little bit skeptical of helping people fund it, is now on board. So the question is, is the Legislature going to look at putting more money into the grant program that helps people get fortified roofs? Because they're still very expensive.

It seems that lawmakers understand that this is a thing they can do that might actually get the phones in their offices to stop ringing from constituents who are upset about their insurance.

So I think probably there will be an effort to get more money into the state lottery program to serve more of the people who have applied.

Roberts: And if I could borrow Quin's argument on the LA GATOR scholarships, I think the evidence of the need is the demand. We had a story in our paper that said there have been 34,000 applications since the state went to a lottery system in 2024, and there have been about 7,000 grants awarded, and the upfront costs are too high for even some of the people who get the grants. So I think there is an imperative there to go back and take a look at

expanding that program.

Money matters

Grace: Let's talk about the other big thing the Louisiana Legislature has to do every year, which is pass a budget. It seems like there's a lot of money now, but there are some concerns going forward. One is coming out of the federal government, cuts in Medicaid that will trickle down to the states.

Another is, frankly, tax cuts; we have gone to a flat 3% income tax and there is a desire to bring that lower. In order to make that work, the Legislature passed another temporary sales tax, but that will expire in a couple years.

And there are new demands for money to incarcerate the extra people who are locked up because of the criminal justice legislation that was passed two years ago, things like that. So what do you think we're looking at with the budget?

Hillyer: We have, I think, very legitimate needs, which are LA GATOR and fortified roofs. You take those as recurring expenses, even if you only go up a little on each of them, and that takes away a significant part of the surplus from the last two years. Right now, other than for justice and imprisonment, I think the governor's budget is fairly flat, and I would expect this Legislature to be cautious.

Grace: They are a conservative Legislature; they would like to lower taxes more. And so, when universities are looking at funding, for example, I think lawmakers are looking at it through that lens, of being able to pay for what you have, not have programs that are not sustainable.

Hillyer: Let me just say that if they actually want to cut taxes, it would be close to abominable to cut income taxes more without cutting the sales tax. Right now, Louisiana has the single highest average sales tax, combined state and local, in the country.

When you have the highest tax rate, whether it's property, income or sales, you are losing competitive advantage. And in the case of sales taxes, you are burning the poor more than the rich.

Grace: I agree with that. They actually raised the sales tax last year in order to pay for the lower income tax. What they often do with sales taxes is they make them temporary. So we will be having another conversation about this ahead of 2030, when the rate is now set to drop somewhat.

Sutton: And congressional redistricting is also out there. There have already been bills filed to change districts in the state. I certainly have been of the thought that nothing significant would be happening in time for midterms, but apparently, some folks think that there may be an opening whenever the U.S. Supreme Court weighs in on the Callais case, which is a challenge to Louisiana's current map featuring two Black majority districts, and apparently they might be prepared to make some moves.

Grace: If we're talking about that toward the end of the session, people will have already voted.

Sutton: So would people get their votes back?

Grace: I don't see how they can make a change at that point, but apparently there are people who think so. There are some ills ready to move just in case, so we will see.



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