

Can a Texas turkey hunt move the needle on auto insurance reform in Louisiana?

By Dillon Lowe



Last week, Gov. Jeff Landry, five legislative leaders and two prominent personal injury attorneys gathered at a Texas hunting lodge to hunt turkeys and discuss how Louisiana's sky-high auto insurance rates might be addressed in the upcoming regular legislative session.

The two attorneys on the trip were Baton Rouge's Gordon McKernan and Lafayette's Digger Earles. Protect Louisiana Values, one of Landry's political organizations, [reportedly funded the trip](#), though McKernan flew the five legislative leaders to Texas on his firm's private jet.

State Rep. Jack McFarland, R-Jonesboro, one of the legislators on the trip, told *Daily Report* on Monday afternoon that the goal of the trip was simply to open lines of

communication between two camps historically locked in bitter opposition—legislators pushing for tort reform on behalf of their constituents in the business community, and the trial bar defending its own interests and the interests of its plaintiffs.

"I felt compelled to sit down with anyone who has a stake in this and see if we could come to some compromise or solution," McFarland said. "And that should not be a bad thing. That should be a good thing. I think that's what you all should expect us to do—communicate with everyone involved."

At the heart of the discussions, McFarland said, was the long-running fight over "collateral source" reforms, or efforts to limit how much plaintiffs can recover for medical expenses. Trial lawyers have historically opposed such measures, arguing that they erode compensation for victims. Business leaders counter that inflated judgments only serve to drive up Louisiana's auto insurance premiums.

McFarland, a business owner himself, has sponsored tort reform bills in the past. While he made it clear that he values last week's dialogue, he said his priorities haven't changed in any meaningful way.

"It was insightful, and it gave me a very different perspective on some of the things I didn't understand," he said. "But I still hold the opinion that collateral source is a vital part of this. I still think we have to do a better job of getting that under control."

McFarland emphasized that the talks were more about gaining perspective than negotiating concrete policy.

"Were there any agreements made? No, none were made while I was present in the room," he said.

McFarland chairs the House Appropriations Committee. Also on the trip, [according to media reports](#), were House Speaker Phillip DeVillier; Senate President Cameron Henry; state Sen. Patrick McMath, R-Covington, who chairs the Senate Health and Welfare Committee; state Sen. Kirk Talbot, R-River Ridge, who chairs the Senate Insurance Committee; and Kyle Ruckert, Landry's chief of staff.

Though no business lobbyists were on the trip, Will Green, president and CEO of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, tells *Daily Report* via email that he welcomes efforts to bring "transparency and fairness" to Louisiana's legal system.

"We are committed to passing legislation that will attract more insurers to the market to help stabilize and lower insurance-related costs," Green writes. "For too long, we have failed to enact much-needed reforms that would limit jackpot justice and prioritize the citizens and businesses who are folding under the weight of high insurance due to lawsuit abuse."

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