Mayors Meet With Edwards To Talk Taxes And Liability

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Mayor Dud Lastrapes is in Baton Rouge today, finding out what he can about the state revenue picture and its effect on Lafayette — that and municipal liability.

The mayor's itinerary includes a mid-morning meeting with the Louisiana Trial Lawyers Association and a noon meeting with Gov.-elect Edwin Edwards.

Mayors from at least half a dozen Louisiana cities are meeting with Edwards to discuss his tax package and what it means for municipalities.

They'll be asking that Edwards give their cities more leeway in local taxation, said City spokesman Tim Maragos.

The earlier meeting with the Trial Lawyers Association will focus on the possibility of reintroducing a liability bill in the upcoming legislative session, Maragos said.

Preliminary Meeting

Lastrapes was in New Orleans with other mayors and city representatives Sunday to discuss revenues and liability.

The weekend meeting was also attended by New Orleans Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial, Monroe Mayor Bob Powell, Baton Rouge Mayor Pat Screen and mayors of Bossier City, Shreveport and Lake Charles.

"We're hoping to appeal to the governor to relax some of the restrictions on the municipalities' taxing authority," said Powell. "We need to be able to generate more revenue on our own."

Failing that, some form of statewide revenue sharing should be instituted to provide the cities "with a budgetable amount of funding," he added.

"We used to receive revenue from the state, but we depended primarily on the Legislature and traditionally budgeted some of those funds in our fiscal planning. For the last three years, those funds have been absolutely zero."

Liability, Too

Powell said the mayors also think something needs to be done about restricting municipalities' liability.

"If someone walks in front of a bus or trips on a sidewalk, we could get hit with a lawsuit that could very quickly deplete any city's revenues," he said.

Lastrapes was not available for comment this morning, but Maragos said the mayor plans to bring up the liability issue with the Trial Association first.

He will then talk to Edwards about that, about possible road and drainage revenues for Lafayette from state taxation and about "keeping the municipalities in mind," Maragos said.