



## **Our Views: Vote to reduce N.O. assessors**

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The people of New Orleans and the state must approve a long-overdue constitutional amendment to consolidate in one office the seven property tax assessors' offices in Orleans Parish.

The approval — or rejection — of this amendment will tell us a great deal about the ability of Louisiana, and particularly New Orleans, to aspire to better governance in the post-Katrina world.

Based on the old ward system, the division of Orleans into seven assessment districts no longer has any rational basis, either by population or type of structures assessed. Every other parish in the state gets by with one elected assessor, and two of them — in Jefferson and East Baton Rouge parishes — are responsible for more in property values than in all seven of the Orleans districts.

The Public Affairs Research Council has called for reform of this system for more than 30 years. The Council for A Better Louisiana pushed for Amendment 7, as did Gov. Kathleen Blanco and a diverse assortment of citizen groups. The amendment will save taxpayers in the city at least \$587,000 in operating costs, and with a single official responsible for the entire city, should help alleviate over time the chronic problem of widely varying assessments of property.

Still, common sense was a tough sell in the Legislature. The seven assessors' offices have become political baronies. Entrenched political interests, including family members of assessors in the Legislature, fought this idea tooth and nail. It is only the outrage of hurricane-afflicted citizens of Orleans that made this reform possible.

For this consolidation to take effect, a majority of voters in both Orleans and statewide must approve the amendment on Nov. 7. Several of the assessors, including those in the most populous areas of the devastated parish, likely will fight this at the grass-roots level. We hope they are not successful.

The vote on this amendment is about more than tax assessment problems in a single parish, or even the boost to redevelopment that a fair and comprehensive assessment of property will provide the city.

This is about our willingness to embrace change for the long-term good of Louisiana in the wake of the horrendous human and property cost of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

We urge voters to approve Amendment 7 on the Nov. 7 ballot.