



The Nov. 7 constitutional amendments

Nov. 1, 2006

The madness must stop. A little more than a month ago, the Louisiana Legislature put a whopping 13 constitutional amendments on the Sept. 30 ballot. It included a number of important hurricane-related measures regarding coastal funding and eminent domain, but there were also a few less-than-vital proposed amendments, like asking voters to constitutionalize such issues as election protocol should the Lieutenant Governor leave office.

Now the Legislature is at it again, putting eight proposed constitutional amendments on next Tuesday's Nov. 7 ballot. It's in keeping with Louisiana's unnecessary and unfortunate habit of continually amending its constitution, often with unnecessary amendments. Since our Constitution was first adopted in 1921, Louisiana has added more than 650 amendments — more than any other state. Far too often, the effect of such constitutional amendments could be achieved through legislation, rather than consistently asking voters to wade through proposed amendments written in tortured legalese. It's tempting to reject these latest eight proposed amendments on the Nov. 7 ballot on principle alone, but there are a few particularly worthy amendments this time around, so we'll address them individually. We also recommend that voters visit the Public Affairs Research Council Web site (www.par.org) for a more detailed analysis of each amendment.

- 1) Amendment No. 1 would benefit certain current and former disabled military members by freezing their property tax assessments. It also would apply to spouses of military personnel killed in action. We vote FOR Amendment 1.
- 2) By voting for this amendment — which would increase the amount of state oil and gas severance tax revenue collected by the originating parishes from \$750,000 to \$850,000 — voters are at least assured that a future proposed constitutional amendment on the issue won't crop up. It caps the oil and gas tax at \$850,000 and automatically adjusts it for inflation in the future, so we vote FOR Amendment 2.
- 3) Too often, proposed amendments take a good idea and ruin the intent by using imprecise language that leaves too many loopholes. That's the case here, as this amendment attempts to exempt rural nonprofit hospitals from property taxes on leased medical equipment. It's a noble idea, but PAR notes that only three out of 34 nonprofit hospitals would qualify for the exemption under this amendment. We vote AGAINST Amendment 3.
- 4) New Orleanians should be turning out in force to support this amendment, which would kill the property taxes on motor vehicles in New Orleans. The Crescent City is the only Louisiana city to tax vehicle ownership, and especially given the financial hardships facing so many New Orleanians post-Katrina, it's time for the tax to be rescinded. We vote FOR Amendment 4.
- 5) This is another example of an issue that could be handled with legislation instead of burdening the constitution. That said, it's still worth supporting, as it prevents property taxes

on art being sold on consignment at art galleries or businesses. Sales taxes are already collected on art sales, and there's no need to add another tax on top of it. We vote FOR Amendment 5.

6) Amendment No. 6 would allow for new family and juvenile judgeships. The constitution already allows legislators to create general judgeships, and this would extend that discretion into the creation of family and juvenile judgeships in existing district courts. Allowing trained and capable judges in those fields to focus on those areas would be beneficial, so we vote FOR Amendment 6.

7) No proposed amendment on the ballot is as important as this one. Amendment 7 would consolidate New Orleans' seven assessors into one, and this move is long overdue. The current seven-assessor system has been rife with political patronage and waste for years, and New Orleans is the only parish in the state to use more than one assessor. As New Orleans and Louisiana continue the post-hurricane rebuilding effort and attempt to show the rest of the country that the days of cronyism and good ol' boy politics are over, passing this amendment would send a powerful message. We vote FOR Amendment 7.

8) This amendment could set a dangerous precedent. The Central community in Baton Rouge — part of East Baton Rouge Parish — isn't happy with operating as part of the larger school system and wants to secede and form its own school system. Opponents of the measure, including the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, argue that allowing Central to form its own school system will divert funds from other schools, as well as waste educational funds on a whole new layer of bureaucracy in the standalone school. We vote AGAINST Amendment 8.

Is Louisiana's reliance on constitutional amendments often unnecessary and wasteful? Yes. But until the system is reformed, your vote on these amendments counts more than ever, and we urge you to head to the polls on Nov. 7 and let your voice be heard.