



## PAR questions need of stream of constitutional amendments

By Mike Hasten  
mhasten@gannett.com

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BATON ROUGE — The four constitutional amendments on the Oct. 20 ballot raise more of a question of should they be inserted into the ever-growing document than of what they would accomplish, political observers say.

"We've gotten away from the framework of the constitution and are just adding details," said Jim Brandt, Public Affairs Research Council president.

It's not PAR's job to tell voters how they should decide issues but instead present the facts on both sides of the issue, Brandt says. "Guide to the Proposed Constitutional Amendments" is available on PAR's Web site and explains the potential impact of the four amendments.

The constitution, adopted in 1974 after a massive 250,000-word 1921 document was reworked, started out as "a manageable 3,500 words," Brandt said. So far, 148 of the 210 proposed amendments have been adopted, doubling the length of the original document. Last year, a record 21 amendments were approved.

Barry Erwin, president of the Council for a Better Louisiana, said voters should "wonder where we draw the line" and stop putting so many things in the constitution.

CABL is free to express an opinion, Erwin said. It recommends voting against the first two amendments and approving the third. The fourth amendment is a toss-up.

But Brandt said he is concerned that "we continue to add more detail to constitutional provisions. The Legislature can hardly make any change without another amendment" because so many things have been inserted into the document.

The first two amendments affect the state policy of paying a supplemental salary to local law enforcement officers and firefighters. The policy was first implemented in 1956 for sheriff's deputies but has expanded over the years to include others in the law enforcement field and firefighters.

The first amendment would guarantee that the current supplemental pay level — \$425 a month — could never be decreased and any future increase in supplemental pay would automatically receive constitutional protection.

The second amendment is designed to stretch the supplemental pay benefit and protection to include port and harbor police and firefighters in New Orleans.

Amendment No. 3 affects the way the state covers increases in retirement benefits for state employees. It would require that any legislatively approved retirement benefit increase would have to have an identified funding source that will pay off the benefit within 10 years, instead of the 30 years allowed now.

The fourth amendment expands an existing constitutional provision that grants a property tax exemption for art work that is held for sale by consignment. If approved, jewelry submitted for consignment sale also would be exempt.