

Brandt: Constitution too bulky **PAR says so many amendments have hurt voter interest**

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Jim Brandt of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana said the state's constitution has been changed so many times that voters barely take notice when amendments appear on the ballot.

"The amendments are so far off of the radar screen that most people aren't even aware that we have more amendments to be voted on," said Brandt, who spoke during a West Monroe-West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce luncheon next week.

When Louisiana voters go to the polls Tuesday, they'll have eight more amendments on the ballot less than two months after passing 13 amendments Sept. 30.

The combined 21 amendments are the most on the ballot since the constitution was adopted in 1974 and the most in the nation this year. The Louisiana Constitution has been amended 140 times since 1974.

By comparison, Brandt said the states with the second most amendments on the ballot this year are Colorado and South Carolina with seven each.

Brandt blamed Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for the number of amendments proposed this year, but he said the reason the constitution is amended so many times is that voters don't trust legislators and legislators don't trust each other.

"Many have suggested that we go back to the drawing board" and draft a new constitution, Brandt said. "But PAR doesn't believe this is the right time to do that."

Brandt cited three reasons to delay drafting a new constitution.

"We don't see a great shift in an attitude of trust in the Legislature, we

could end up with something worse and we believe it would be better to wait until term limits take effect (next year)," Brandt said.

The following amendments are on the Nov. 7 ballot:

- No. 1 would free property tax assessments for the military and disabled.
- No. 2 would increase the parish severance tax allocation from the state.
- No. 3 would allow a property tax exemption for leased medical equipment.
- No. 4 would extend the motor vehicle property tax exemption to municipal taxes.
- No. 5 would provide a property tax exemption for consigned art.
- No. 6 would create new family and juvenile judgeships.
- No. 7 would consolidate the number of tax assessors in New Orleans.
- No. 8 would allow four schools in the East Baton Rouge School District to break away and form a new school district.

PAR doesn't take positions on amendments, but it does provide analyses that can be found at www.la-par.org.