

# Seven changes await voters on ballot

Vote on altering constitution in fall  
Thursday, July 03, 2008

By Ed Anderson

BATON ROUGE -- Besides casting ballots for president, members of Congress and a U.S. senator in the Nov. 4 elections, voters will determine if seven proposals passed by the Legislature will become part of the state's growing constitution, including measures to set a three-term limit for members of 10 key state boards and another to funnel more oil and gas revenues to parishes. Legislators filed 48 proposed changes to the state constitution in the recent session, but only seven mustered the two-thirds legislative support to put them on the November ballot, where a majority vote will make them law.

Since the state charter went into effect in 1974, lawmakers have sent 214 proposed changes to voters who have approved 151 of them, a little more than 70 percent.

--- Board term limits ---

Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council of Baton Rouge, a statewide non-partisan think tank, said one of the major changes would be the proposed imposition of a three-term limit on boards such as the elected Public Service Commission, the state agency that regulates utility and trucking companies; the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the partially appointed, partially elected board that oversees education policy in kindergarten through 12th grade; the appointed boards that operate the Louisiana State University and Southern University systems; the University of Louisiana System board that operates regional colleges such as Southeastern Louisiana University; and the Board of Regents, the agency that coordinates higher education policy in the state.

The other board whose members will face a three-term limit under Senate Bill 232 by Sen. Willie Mount, D-Lake Charles, are the Board of Supervisors of the Community and Technical Colleges, which oversee the state's vocational schools; the state Forestry Commission, the agency that plays a role in regulating the forestry industry; the State Civil Service Commission that regulates pay and hiring and firing conditions for state workers; and the State Police Commission, which regulates pay grades and hiring and dismissal of state troopers. Mount's proposal would allow those who hold seats now to be eligible to serve three more terms. A House-added change places a ban on "board-hopping," requiring a member of one board to sit out two years before seeking appointment or election to one of the other nine boards.

There are no limits on any of the boards now. Mount said since lawmakers are limited to three terms in each chamber, the boards should have the same limits in order to keep "fresh faces and fresh ideas" in the agencies.

--- Other amendments ---

The other item that could draw a significant turnout, Brandt said, is a proposal by Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, to divert about \$37 million in mineral revenues from oil and gas production from the state treasury to producing parishes starting July 1. The amount would increase to \$56.3 million by July 1, 2010.

Gallot said 30 parishes would be able to share in the increase in revenues, the parishes in which exploration is under way. The constitution limits the parishes where the production takes place to no more than \$850,000 a year in mineral revenue.

Gallot's proposal would take it to a maximum of \$1.85 million starting July 1 and \$2.85 million a year later. It also would allow a cost-of-living increase in the allocation formula based on the Consumer Price Index, so the state charter does not have to be amended every time the mineral royalties go up or down, Gallot said.

Barry Erwin, president of the Council for a Better Louisiana, a private, non-partisan research organization said a third proposal may also draw some attention: changing the constitution to allow the House speaker or Senate president to name interim replacements to serve for lawmakers called to military duty for six months or more.

House Bill 183 by Rep. Nicholas Lorusso, R-New Orleans, and its companion House Bill 164 would allow an activated lawmaker to nominate three individuals as a replacement. A House or Senate panel would conduct hearings on the nominees and the House speaker or Senate president would select the interim replacement, who would have to meet the qualifications for the office. The interim replacement would be barred from running for the seat in the next election.

"These (three) are pretty significant shifts in public policy," Erwin said. "The other (four) are more limited in scope. . . . But term limits always attract attention." The order of the amendments on the ballot has not yet been determined by the secretary of state's office, officials said.

.....  
Ed Anderson can be reached at eanderson@timespicayune.com or 225.342.5810.