

## 87 constitutional changes proposed

By MARSHA SHULER  
Advocate Capitol News Bureau  
Published: Apr 12, 2010

Lawmakers are considering 87 changes to the Louisiana Constitution during the 2010 legislative session.

The proposals include those to extend term limits to more elected officials, abolish the lieutenant governor's and state treasurer's offices, and make it easier for colleges to increase tuition and access money in special trust funds in times of state financial distress.

Other proposals would increase the state's homestead exemption, help governments put blighted property back into commerce and eliminate the State Civil Service Commission, which protects state workers from political influences.

"It was a surprise to us that there were so many," said Public Affairs Research Council President Jim Brandt.

Lawmakers considered 60 proposed constitutional amendments last year, Brandt said. Six ended up getting the required two-thirds legislative vote to be sent to state voters this fall for approval, he said. Two are on the Oct. 2 ballot and four on the Nov. 2 ballot.

State representatives are proposing 52 changes. Senators filed 35 for consideration this session.

There could easily be another 10 to 15 issues on the ballot this fall after lawmakers complete their session June 21, said Brandt. "It will add to the patchwork of amendments."

Brandt said the Louisiana Constitution has been amended more than 150 times since the latest version was adopted in 1974.

"It is a fact that in Louisiana we love our constitutions and we love amending them," said Brandt. "This amendment process continues."

Secretary of State Jay Dardenne said his office will be monitoring the progress of the constitutional proposals carefully because of the potential for election ballot overload.

Dardenne said whatever passes, he wants to make sure that the proposals are split between the October and November statewide elections, so neither voters nor voting machinery are overloaded at one time with propositions.

“Obviously we have a concern because of how many local propositions, local elections, federal elections and the lieutenant governor’s race will also be on the ballot,” said Dardenne. “We are watching it carefully. It is an issue. We are not concerned at this point.”

Dardenne said a lot of proposals probably won’t receive the two-thirds legislative vote of approval to send them on to voters.

In some years past, there have been overwhelming numbers of proposed changes on one subject such as expropriation procedures, Brandt said.

“In this case, they are all over the waterfront — term limits, changes in the organization of government, retirement changes, a whole multitude of subjects that are not in the normal course,” said Brandt.

Brandt said what is driving the volume, to a large extent, is every time the constitution is amended more details are put in and even small changes require another amendment.

“Another factor that seems to be driving so many amendments is the result of errors in the past, unintended consequences,” said Brandt.

For instance, the current constitution made it too difficult for governments to get rid of blighted property, so lawmakers are back trying to ease the burden, he said.

“There’s also a lot of these amendments somehow related to the budget process,” said Brandt, fueled by state government streamlining and efforts to achieve more budget flexibility in tough financial times.

The constitution has more than doubled in size since 1974, he said.

“Ideally, you would like to see a stable, sort of core document where you don’t see the frequency of amendment we see,” said Brandt. “But how do we strip the document back down to a manageable level passed in 1974? Once in the constitution, any interest wants to stay there.”