

Coming for 2009: Effects of three new constitutional amendments

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Louisiana voters approved three of the seven constitutional amendments on the Nov. 4 ballot. The three new amendments will impose term limits for certain board and commission members, require extra notice in advance of a special legislative session and allow temporary successors to be appointed for legislators deployed to active military duty.

This result is somewhat surprising considering that voters have approved all but one of the 30 amendment proposals in the five elections since 2004.

The early ballot data indicate some degree of voter fatigue or apathy regarding the issues addressed by the amendments. The number of people casting votes on each of the seven proposals shows a steady decline from the first to the last. More than 100,000 additional voters weighed in Amendment 1 than on Amendment 7.

First, the numbers

Here are the unofficial ballot results from the Louisiana Secretary of State's office.

- Amendment 1 (passed): 69 percent or 1,129,779 for, 31 percent or 497,253 against.
- Amendment 2 (passed): 60 percent or 952,046 for, 40 percent or 641,308 against.
- Amendment 3 (passed): 62 percent or 981,458 for, 38 percent or 607,741 against.
- Amendment 4 (failed): 45 percent or 704,057 for, 55 percent or 874,196 against.
- Amendment 5 (failed): 50 percent or 778,206 for, 50 percent or 780,047 against.
- Amendment 6 (failed): 49 percent or 771,051 for, 51 percent or 786,933 against.
- Amendment 7 (failed): 44 percent or 670,756 for, 56 percent or 841,927 against.

Not only do the results indicate voter drop-off from the first to the last amendment, but they also indicate that more than 300,000 voters statewide likely chose not to weigh in on the amendments at all. The total votes cast for president was 1,958,059.

What it means

Amendment 1 will limit to three the number of consecutive terms a person could be appointed to serve on the following boards and commissions: Public Service Commission, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, Board of Regents, Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System, Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Board of Supervisors of Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Board of Supervisors of Community and Technical Colleges, Forestry Commission, State Civil Service Commission and State Police Commission.

If a person serves more than two-and-one-half consecutive terms, he or she could not be reappointed or reelected to any board or commission on the list for a period of at least two years following completion of the terms.

Current members of boards and commissions will be allowed to finish out their terms and their next term will count as their first for the purposes of term limits.

Amendment 2 will change the required advance notice for calling a special session from five days to seven calendar days.

Amendment 3 will require that the Legislature provide for a method of appointing a temporary successor for legislators who are called to active military duty.

Companion legislation outlines further details, including a prohibition on a temporary successor from qualifying to run for the office while serving as a replacement for a legislator on active duty. Immediate family members will not be allowed to serve as temporary successors. Immediate family is defined as children, the spouses of children, siblings and their spouses, parents, spouse, and the parents of the spouse.

The statute will require that the elected legislator's order to active duty must be for a period of 180 days or more for a successor to be appointed. All applicable

qualifications for eligibility to serve in that district would be required of the successor.

Temporary successors will serve only for the duration of the elected legislator's term of office or until he or she returns from active duty. Successors will be required to comply with the same ethics laws governing all elected legislators, except financial disclosure statements would be required only of those who serve six months or more.

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