

# Daily Comet

Lafourche Parish, Louisiana

## Changes address officials' roles

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First in a series on the seven state constitutional amendments on Tuesday's ballot

BATON ROUGE – Three constitutional amendments on Tuesday's ballot address the way political appointees and state lawmakers do their jobs.

Amendment No. 1 would create a limit of three consecutive terms for members of some of the state's highest-profile boards, like the Public Service Commission and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Presently, there are no term limits for many of Louisiana's boards and commissions.

The proposed amendment would also impact the State Police Commission, Board of Regents, Civil Service Commission, Forestry Commission and the boards of supervisors for all three university management boards and the Louisiana Community and Technical College system.

Even though the Council for a Better Louisiana, a nonprofit watchdog in Baton Rouge, has traditionally taken no position on term limits, Executive Director Barry Erwin said the proposal has merit.

“In this case, CABL believes term limits for boards and commissions are worthy of support to inject new people with fresh ideas into public service and to create some uniformity with respect to term limits across various governmental entities,” he said.

Depending on the board, Constitutional Amendment No. 1 still allows individuals to serve from 12 to 18 years, and the change would likely have only a limited impact on appointed boards since new governors tend to make their own appointments, Erwin added.

Opponents, such as the New Orleans-based Bureau of Governmental Research, say there are instances where board service requires the development of specialized knowledge that can only come with experience.

Janet R. Howard, the group's president, said there are concerns that the amendment could restrict a term-limited member from service on another board or commission.

"The proposed amendment is poorly conceived and overly broad," Howard said.

Amendment No. 2 would require the governor to notify lawmakers in detail about a planned special session at least seven days prior to its start -- instead of the current five.

Unlike regular sessions, special sessions are unscheduled and stem from an emergency need or financial conditions. By law, however, the governor and Legislature can convene a special session for practically any reason.

In its guide, the Public Affairs Research Council, a Baton Rouge think-tank, endorses Amendment No. 2.

"This is not a major issue, and perhaps not necessary, but it does add some degree of clarity to existing law and would seem to give lawmakers and the public a little more time to digest and understand issues to be debated in a special legislative session," PAR President Jim Brandt said.

The Bureau of Governmental Research opposes the proposed change, but this time on principle.

"The notice issue is too insignificant to warrant a constitutional amendment," Howard said. "In addition, there may be times when it is useful for the extraordinary sessions to be called on five-days notice."

Not including the seven new proposals slated for this year, Louisiana voters have considered 214 amendments since the 1974 Constitution was adopted. To date, 151 of those amendments have been approved.

The concept of the constitution is a relatively permanent statement of basic law, said Brandt, and it fades with the adoption of each new amendment.

"In each case, voters should consider not only the merits of the amendment, but also whether the proposed language belongs in the constitution," Brandt said.

Amendment No. 3 is the final proposal on the fall ballot that addresses elected officials.

It would allow for a temporary appointment to fill the seat of a legislator serving on active duty in the armed services for more than 180 days.

State Rep. Nick Lorusso, R-New Orleans, who wrote the proposed amendment, is the only lawmaker who would presently be impacted.

Erwin said making temporary legislative appointments is likely not something that will happen often, but CABL says citizens should have representation and constituent services while a legislator is serving on active duty.

“This is clearly charting new territory in Louisiana, but given the increased likelihood that legislators could find themselves unable to perform their elected duties because of military service, we believe this is a reasonable approach to take,” he said.

In contrast, the Bureau of Governmental Research has taken the stance that the “responsible course of action” for a legislator called to extended military duty is to resign.

The group “appreciates the sacrifices made by military personnel. However, an individual’s interest in maintaining a legislative seat is outweighed by his constituents’ right to elect the individual who represents them,” the bureau said in a study of the proposed amendment.

All of the proposed amendments would take effect if and when they are passed by voters.