



Four of seven amendments defeated in La. Term-limit plan OK'd by greatest margin

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By Robert Travis Scott

BATON ROUGE -- Louisiana voters did something a tad unusual Tuesday: They defeated four of the seven constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Before this week, only one of 30 proposed amendments since 2004 has gotten the thumbs down in a statewide referendum. Voters Tuesday passed the first three amendments on the ballot and rejected the remaining four.

Also, voter fatigue or apathy regarding the amendment issues is evident by the number of votes cast, a government monitoring group said.

"The number of people casting votes on each of the seven proposals shows a steady decline from the first to the last," said Jim Brandt, president of the nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana. "More than 100,000 additional voters weighed in on Amendment No. 1 than on Amendment No. 7."

While 66.5 percent of registered voters in Louisiana participated in the presidential race, the amendments at best got 55 percent voter participation.

--- Term limits passed ---

The biggest margin of victory was 69 percent voting in favor of No. 1, which imposes term limits on members of the Public Service Commission, state education boards and several other commissions.

The passage of No. 2 means that a call for a special legislative session must be issued at least seven days before the start of a session, up from the previous five-day period.

Amendment No. 3 was designed by and for state Rep. Nicholas Lorusso, R-New Orleans, a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve who has been called up for a year of active military duty starting in February. Passed on Tuesday, his amendment will let the House speaker or Senate president name a temporary legislator to fill a seat when an incumbent is called up for active military duty for at least 180 days.

Voters dismissed No. 4, which would have shifted a limited amount of oil and gas severance tax revenue from the state to parishes where the industry activity is the greatest.

The closest vote among the amendments was the rejection of No. 5, which would have allowed for the transfer of a special assessment of property value if certain homeowners had their properties expropriated by the government. The proposal fell short by 1,848 votes, about one-tenth of 1 percent of the votes cast.

--- Expropriated property ---

From the standpoint of New Orleans' recovery from Hurricane Katrina, the defeat of No. 6 was perhaps the most significant vote. It would have reworked a 2006 amendment that put restrictions on how expropriated property can be transferred back to the original owner if the government decides that the property is no longer needed for a public purpose.

Supported by the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, No. 6 would have removed the requirement in these resale situations that the government first offer expropriated property to the prior property owner. It would have applied only to blighted or abandoned properties. A majority of Orleans Parish voters supported the measure.

The largest defeat among the amendments was the 44 percent in favor of No. 7, which would have allowed state and local governments to put money into the stock market from non-pension, post-employment benefit funds. The perception of risk created by the recent crisis on Wall Street was considered a hazard for that amendment.

Before Tuesday's election, 214 amendments had been proposed and 151 adopted since the 1974 state Constitution, a passage rate of 71 percent, according to the council.

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Robert Travis Scott can be reached at rscott@timespicayune.com or 225.342.4197.