



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

Let your voice be heard in rebuilding the Greater New Orleans Area


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Monroe News-Star

Our View

October 31, 2006

The Nov. 7 ballot is short but there are eight amendments to the Louisiana Constitution for your consideration. We urge you to educate yourself on the issues and exercise your right to vote—and if no other ballot issue compels you to vote, Amendment No. 7 should.

Amendment No. 7 will consolidate the seven separate assessors in New Orleans into a single, parish-wide elected office to be elected at the same time as municipal officers of New Orleans. Since an election for these offices was held this year, the offices would not be consolidated until 2010. This amendment must be passed by voters statewide and in Orleans Parish. It faces an uphill battle with Crescent City locals.

There are scores of distinctives in New Orleans' government and culture that we not only appreciate and celebrate, we underwrite them with tax monies collected statewide. We agree that as the state's historical centerpiece, New Orleans is a shared value worthy of state subsidies.

But we resent being asked to contribute funds from the state's coffers—coffers that are built with sweat equity from millions of citizens statewide — to compensate for inefficiency and mismanagement of public monies and abuse of power. The assessor system in New Orleans represents all of the above.

According to the Bureau of Governmental Research, changes in the state's law will see the New Orleans Board of Assessors nearly double its 2006 revenue to approximately \$6.3 million — twice the amount of any other assessor's office in Louisiana. There are other resources available to the assessors that do not surface in their budget such as contributions to the assessors' retirement fund. By contrast the Ouachita Parish Tax Assessor's revenue estimate for 2006 is \$1.4 million and its budget per parcel is 63 percent less than that of New Orleans.

Many residents of the Big Easy are attached to the current system because the smaller assessment districts make it so easy for property owners to meet with their assessor one-on-one. We believe that it is those very personal relationships that can undermine equitable assessments crucial to the city's recovery from Katrina.

After Katrina, the range of assessment cuts was amazingly disparate. For example, on one side of St. Charles Avenue, property owners received a 50 percent decrease in their assessment. In a district just steps across the boulevard, the reduction was 15 percent. Districts where no flooding occurred provided no reductions at all — despite the storm's widespread impact.

We believe that a single parish assessor would result in systematic, equitable property valuations that would ultimately increase city revenues. That's good. When New Orleans residents pay more for their city's services, the rest of us pay less.

The bottom line is that this archaic system takes money from your pocket, lines the pockets of the New Orleans assessors and requires unfair subsidies from taxpayers statewide.

It is an unfair system and we urge you to vote yes for Amendment No. 7.