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### ***Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.***

#### **Levee change OK'd \*\*\* Amendment consolidates La. boards**

Date: Oct 1, 2006

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A plan to make levee oversight in southeast Louisiana more professional and less political won lopsided voter approval on Saturday.

Proposed Constitutional Amendment No. 3 was passing with 81 percent in favor, compared with 19 percent opposed, with 97 percent of the state's 3,960 precincts reporting late on election night.

It was one of 13 proposed changes in the Louisiana Constitution that voters decided on Saturday.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco, who backed the measure, said voter approval sends a powerful message to the nation that state residents back fundamental levee changes after the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina last year.

"People really care about basic reform in Louisiana," Blanco said Saturday night.

"They want to abolish politics as usual, get rid of cronyism and anything that smacks of special favors," the governor added.

Two other amendments designed to shore up the state's eroding coastline were also winning approval.

Constitutional Amendment No. 1, which would allow the use of oil and gas revenue for coastal restoration and hurricane protection, was winning approval with 82 percent in favor and 18 percent opposed, also with 97 percent of precincts reporting.

Amendment No. 2, which could inject about \$200 million into coastal-restoration efforts, was passing with 79 percent in favor and 21 percent opposed. The money would only be available if the state opts to sell the rest of its settlement from a national tobacco lawsuit over the costs of smoking-related illnesses.

But the levee regulation measure was arguably the most far-reaching of the issues decided on Saturday.

The plan would set up two regional boards to regulate levees in the New Orleans area and nearby parishes starting on Jan. 1.

They would replace long-controversial levee boards, which have been criticized for years for being panels where political connections count more than expertise on hurricane and flood protection.

The new setup will be called the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority.

One of the panels, for the east side of the Mississippi River, will include 11 engineers, hydrologists and other professionals to regulate flood and hurricane protection in all or parts of seven parishes east of the Mississippi River.

The other panel, for the west side of the river, will have seven engineers and other professionals.

Sen. Walter Boasso, R-Arabi and chief legislative sponsor of the levee measure, praised the vote.

"This is a great win for southeast Louisiana, but furthermore it should be a confidence boost for the public," Boasso said Saturday night.

ELECTION RESULTS FOR PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS Statewide unofficial returns with 3,850 of 3,960 precincts reporting

PASSED NO. 1: Allot future federal oil and gas revenue to coastal protection and wetland loss. 82% for, 18% against

PASSED NO. 2: If the state sells the rest of its national tobacco settlement, put 20 percent into a coastal protection fund. 79% for, 21% against

PASSED NO. 3: Merge several levee boards in southeast Louisiana into two boards - one for the east bank, and one for the west bank, of the Mississippi River. 81% for, 19% against

PASSED NO. 4: Restrict amount paid to property owners for land the government takes for hurricane protection. 61% for, 39% against

PASSED NO. 5: Restrict purposes for which government can take land from unwilling property owners. 55% for, 45% against

PASSED NO. 6: Create a set of rules to govern the government when it takes over private property. 50% for, 50% against

PASSED NO. 7: Allow the state to invest some of a medical trust fund in stocks in hopes of boosting earnings. 63% for, 37% against

PASSED NO. 8: Let homeowners keep their homestead exemption from property taxes if their property was damaged by the hurricanes. 79% for, 21% against

PASSED NO. 9: Restrict the Legislature's power to impose costly rules on local school boards. 50% for, 50% against

PASSED NO. 10: Let universities invest some trust funds in stocks in hopes of boosting earnings. 59% for, 41% against

PASSED NO. 11: Allow homes controlled by a trust to qualify for a homestead exemption from paying property taxes. 66% for, 34% against

PASSED NO. 12: Hold an election to replace a vacancy in the office of lieutenant governor. 69% for, 31% against

PASSED NO. 13: Increase the five years of minimum legal experience required to run for judge. 70% for, 30% against

Caption: The B.W. graphic shows the election results for the proposed constitutional amendments in the September 2006 election. (Advocate graphic)

Credit: Capitol news bureau

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