



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.

Voters show will to change

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A ballot measure that will cut the ranks of New Orleans assessors from seven to one won lopsided approval in part because of a new voter willingness for change after Hurricane Katrina, key supporters of the measure said Wednesday.

"We are telling the nation we are taking responsibility for the recovery," said Ruthie Frierson, chairwoman of Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans, which spent about \$300,000 to promote the plan.

"It really demonstrated the will of the people over the politics of the past," Frierson said.

All eight constitutional amendments on the statewide ballot passed in Tuesday's voting.

The assessor plan, Constitutional Amendment No. 7, won approval from 78 percent of Louisiana voters compared to 22 percent opposed, said returns from all of the state's 3,960 precincts.

It was backed by voters in every parish, mostly by huge margins, and passed Orleans Parish 68 percent to 32 percent. The measure had to win majority support statewide, and approval in Orleans Parish, to take effect.

Little organized opposition surfaced. However, backers were concerned that ending such a longtime system might face problems in tradition-laden New Orleans.

"I was a little concerned," said Sen. Ann Duplessis, D-New Orleans and Senate sponsor of the amendment, which had to overcome opposition from a handful of critics before clearing the Legislature. Opponents said the change would put too much power in the hands of one assessor.

Tax assessors determine the value of homes and commercial property for tax purposes, which determines how much owners pay.

One key reason the amendment passed, Duplessis said, is that residents have shown more of a "we have to take care of ourselves" attitude since Katrina struck last year.

Backers said it was critical to let the rest of the nation know that, with the population of New Orleans at 200,000 or less, voters were willing to go with one assessor, which every other parish in Louisiana and most major cities outside of the state use.

"We were very good at getting the message out, getting the facts out," Duplessis said.

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