

BRAC releases positions on EBR and statewide ballot referendums for November 8 election

With early voting starting tomorrow, BRAC today released its positions on certain referendums that will go before the voters on November 8, including two propositions before the voters of East Baton Rouge Parish, and two of six proposed statewide constitutional amendments. BRAC is neutral or has taken no position on the other ballot initiatives appearing on the November 8 ballot.

BRAC will release its positions on propositions appearing on the December 10 ballot before early voting begins in that election.

East Baton Rouge Propositions

In East Baton Rouge, the two propositions BRAC is taking a position on deal with the funding of parish agencies – the major difference being that one is a new, relatively large tax for an agency perceived not to be well run, while the other is a tax renewal at existing funding levels for an agency widely regarded as being very well run.

Parishwide Council on Aging Proposition

Voters are being asked to authorize the levy and collection of a new 2.25 mills ad valorem property tax for 10 years, which would raise almost \$7.9 million annually for the East Baton Rouge Council on Aging (COA). This level of taxation would more than double the COA's revenue of close to \$3.7 million in 2015. What's more, during the First Special Session of the Legislature earlier this year, when a law was passed restoring a previous statewide rental car tax, some proceeds were divided among parishes, with the COA designated to receive 40 percent of East Baton Rouge Parish's share of rental car tax revenue. Finally, as was reported earlier this year, a fiscal year 2015 audit of the agency found a \$200,000 deficit, a failed bingo hall investment, and concerns about agency finances and management. While BRAC supports services being provided to seniors of the parish, the size of this new tax compared to previous funding levels, coupled with recent financial issues at the agency, are causes for concern.

BRAC Recommendation: No

Parishwide Recreation and Park Commission Proposition

Voters are being asked to renew the levy and collection of a 3.96 mills property tax for 10 years, which would raise just over \$15 million annually for the Recreation and Park Commission (BREC). The amount raised represents about half of BREC's operating and maintenance budget, and is necessary to continue operating facilities, delivering recreation programs and maintaining parks. BREC is a two-time winner of the National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal award, a twelve-time Gold Medal award nominee, and one of 141 total parks departments nationwide accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies, which accredits park and recreation agencies for excellence in operation and service. Continuing excellent parks and recreation facilities and services is a key component of BRAC's focus on quality of place initiatives that attract and retain a talented workforce.

BRAC Recommendation: Yes

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Proposed Constitutional Amendments

After years of state budget cuts to Louisiana higher education institutions, the two constitutional amendments BRAC is taking a position on emphasize greater flexibility – first, in granting those whose proper role it is to administer higher education programs the flexibility to adjust tuition and fees to better reflect costs and need, and second, to grant the legislature greater flexibility to avoid cuts to higher education during times of state fiscal downturns.



Amendment No. 2 – Authorizes Tuition and Fee Autonomy for College Management Boards

With Louisiana representing one of only two states in which college and university tuition authority rests with the Legislature, this amendment would shift that authority to the postsecondary management boards. Such a move would take the decision away from politics and instead put it in the hands of administrators with better knowledge of the needs facing schools and students. It would also make Louisiana colleges and universities more competitive with those of other states with similar autonomy, while providing greater budget stability and flexibility.

BRAC Recommendation: Yes



Amendment No. 6 – Adjusts the Threshold for Using Special Funds to Eliminate Projected Deficits

When the state government experiences budget shortfalls and deficits, higher education and health care invariably take the brunt of budget cuts, primarily because those two budget areas represent the largest share of the unprotected, or discretionary portion of the state's General Fund budget. The state budget also contains some 400 special, protected funds, about 300 of which are appropriated yearly. This amendment would expand the conditions by which legislators could make reductions to these funds following a dip in the state's official revenue forecast in order to mitigate cuts to other areas of the budget, while also maintaining protections for certain funds like coastal protection. While some maintain this amendment would allow for the use of "one-time funds for recurring expenditures," it should be noted that almost all of these protected funds have recurring sources of funding. While this amendment does not go nearly as far as BRAC has previously proposed – which would include sun-setting all statutory dedications and reviewing constitutional dedications – it represents a step in the right direction for budget flexibility.

BRAC Recommendation: Yes

For more information about these and other statewide proposals on the November 8 ballot, BRAC encourages voters to review [PAR's Guide to the 2016 Constitutional Amendments](#).

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