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BGR MEDIA RELEASE

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BGR analyzes City, State ballot items

The Bureau of Governmental Research today releases *On the Ballot: Issues on the Ballot for October 2, 2010*. In the report, BGR analyzes two Orleans Parish propositions and two State constitutional amendments on the October ballot. The report is available on BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

The two Orleans Parish propositions would amend the Home Rule Charter of the City of New Orleans to reconfigure the governance of City recreation services and facilities, and adjust the City Council membership on the Sewerage & Water Board. The State constitutional amendments pertain to the convening date of the State Legislature and the civil service status of employees of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

New Orleans Charter Amendment: Recreation

The charter amendment would eliminate the City's Department of Recreation, commonly known as the New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD), and create the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission. The intent is to transfer the duties and responsibilities of NORD to the new commission.

The proposed amendment stems from widespread concern about NORD's dysfunction. Its problems include frequent turnover of directors, deteriorating facilities, poor maintenance of fields and parks, and inadequate programming. Contributing to these woes are inadequate funding and the structural division of recreation programs and facility maintenance between NORD and the Department Parks and Parkways, respectively.

In the view of proponents, a new governance structure for recreation is necessary to begin addressing those problems. While the Mayor, who appoints the director of NORD, could make some reforms without the need for a new commission, proponents contend that the new commission presents a better opportunity to implement and sustain reforms beyond the tenure of any one mayor. They add that this stability could also help attract and retain better recreation leadership and attract private donations.

BGR Position: FOR. The proposed recreation commission would provide more stable, long-term direction for the City's recreation offerings. This would allow much-needed reforms to take hold and be sustained. It would also facilitate private fund raising. While the Mayor and the City Council must still address funding problems, voters should take the first step by creating the basic vehicle for delivering future reforms.

"For too many years, the city's children have paid the price for NORD's decline and dysfunction," said BGR Chairman Hans B. Jonassen. "The new commission promises a fresh approach to tackling these problems and improving the quality of City recreation."

New Orleans Charter Amendment: Organization of the S&WB

The city charter currently requires that the City Council's two at-large members and a district member appointed by the council serve on the Sewerage & Water Board (S&WB). The proposed amendment would eliminate the requirement that both at-large members serve. Instead, it would allow the City Council to appoint three members, only one of whom must be at-large.

BGR Position: FOR. To make the most of its role on the S&WB, the City Council should have greater freedom in deciding which of its members serve on the board.

Constitutional Amendment No. 1: Changing the Legislature's Schedule

The proposed constitutional amendment would move up the convening dates for the State Legislature by two to three weeks. The legislature would convene on the second Monday in March (up from the last Monday in March) in even-numbered years and on the second Monday in April (up from the last Monday in April) in odd-numbered years. The proposed amendment would also move the effective date of laws enacted by the legislature from August 15 to August 1, to correspond with the altered convening dates. The adjournment date of the legislature would also move earlier in tandem with the new start dates. The length of regular legislative sessions would remain the same.

The amendment resulted from legislators' desire for additional time before the end of the State's fiscal year (June 30) to convene an extraordinary session to deal with any budgetary matters not resolved in the regular legislative session.

BGR Position: FOR. Giving legislators more breathing room to pass a budget before the beginning of the next fiscal year is desirable.

Constitutional Amendment No. 2: GOHSEP Employees

Currently, employees of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) do not have civil service protection. The amendment would constitutionally enshrine the employees' current unclassified status, cementing the Director of GOHSEP's control over the hiring and firing of GOHSEP employees.

BGR Position: AGAINST. GOHSEP employees are vital to the State's disaster readiness, and they are entrusted with the safety and security of Louisiana's citizens. They are entitled to the protection from political pressures afforded to classified State employees.

BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policy-making and the effective use of public resources in the Greater New Orleans area. For more information call 525-4152 or visit BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

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