

# FAX-NET UPDATE

A Weekly Analysis of Upstate Louisiana News and Issues

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\*\*\*WE'RE 5 YEARS OLD TODAY!\*\*\*

## Stop the Presses!

By Lou Gehrig Burnett

### Whew!

Make no mistake about it. The Hightower administration dodged a political bullet on Saturday when five property tax renewals barely passed.

The turnout was atrocious. Only 3.9 percent or 4,527 of the city's 116,009 registered voters went to the polls. But of those who went to the polls, about 44 percent voted against the renewals.

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Without the about \$6.5 million generated from these taxes, the city would have been facing a financial disaster. The total city budget is \$156.7 million. And, as we know, there is no extra money around city hall

that could have been used to make up the difference.

According to our daily newspaper, it was a "shaky economic climate and uncertain global outlook" that accounted for the narrow victory margin for these renewals. That was about the best face the newspaper and city officials could put on the results.

In reality, according to most political observers, it was the fallout over the administration's handling of city finances, particularly bond issue money, that accounted for the significant negative vote. Some of these observers even thought the tax renewals would go down to defeat.

There were several calls to *Tell the Times* and *Letters to the Editor* from disgruntled voters who urged a negative vote on the tax renewals. At the same time, others who are unhappy over bond money spending felt penalizing city employees was not the way to go.

The administration realized it has a credibility problem when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars, so it low-keyed the tax renewals. Little was mentioned about the election, and that is probably why the turnout was so low.

Administration officials counted on city employees to go to the polls and vote for the renewals since their salaries were at stake. Even so, the outcome was a little too close for comfort.

It would be unwise for administration officials to view this vote as a thumbs up for the way they are handling things. One city official said as much, telling the daily that "It appears people are satisfied with what we are doing." That's not the message most observers got from the victory margin on the tax renewals.

Here is the how the vote turned out on the five renewals:

\*Proposition 1 – 1.31 mills to repair streets – Voting for 2,640 or 58%; voting against 1,887 or 42%.

\*Proposition 2 – .98 mills for recreational facilities – Voting for 2,415 or 54%; voting against 2,097 or 46%.

\*Proposition 3 – 1.31 mills for salary and wages – Voting for 2,480 or 55%; voting against 2,014 or 45%.

\*Proposition 4 – 1.31 mills for police and fire budgets – Voting for 2,577 or 57%; voting against 1,908 or 43%.

\*Proposition 5 – 1.99 mills for life insurance – Voting for 2,479 or 55%; voting against 2,014 or 45%.

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