

November 2020 PAL Legislative Report

PAL Legislative Affairs Chairman Matt Gresham, Port NOLA

Whew...glad that is over...I mean...maybe...well, we will see. As of this writing on the afternoon of Nov. 4, the Presidential election is still very much up in the air with key battleground states yet to have final tallies and absentee and mail-in ballots left to be counted and likely disputed by whichever side is on the low end of the final score. Many pundits think there should be a declared winner by Friday and others say the legal challenges could stretch on longer. Luckily, Louisiana is not one of those swing states with a razor thin margin of error at the polls with drama dragging on for days. The Associated Press called Louisiana for Trump literally two minutes after the polls closed, supposedly making sure another Cat 4 hurricane did not surprisingly make landfall and wash all the voting machines out into the Gulf. The President won with a comfortable 58 percent to former Vice President Biden's 40 percent.

Luckily, Louisiana races across the board were mainly cut and dry. Let's get to what we know:

Statewide Races:

U.S. Senate

Incumbent Senator Bill Cassidy was elected to a second term, avoiding a runoff and besting 15 candidates with 59 percent of the vote. Shreveport Mayor Adrian Perkins was a distant second with 19 percent.

Congress

Incumbents Steve Scalise (1st District 72 percent), Cedric Richmond (2nd District 64 percent), Clay Higgins (3rd District 69 percent), Mike Johnson (4th District 60 percent), and Garret Graves (6th District 71 percent) all cruised uncontested to new terms in the House.

The open 5th District seat vacated by the retiring Ralph Abraham, saw former Abraham Chief of Staff Luke Letlow pull 33 percent of the vote to lead a large field with state Rep. Lance Harris making the runoff with 17 percent. The runoff election will be Dec. 5.

Public Service Commissioner

In the PSC 1st District incumbent Eric Skrmetta, who tallied 31 percent of the vote, will face Allen Borne Jr. (25 percent) in a Dec. 5 runoff. In the 5th District, longtime Commissioner Foster Campbell avoided a runoff with 53 percent of the vote.

State Constitutional Amendments

It was a mixed bag for the State's Constitutional Amendments with five of seven on the ballot passing.

No. 1, which added language that states nothing in the Constitution protects the right to an abortion passed with 62 percent.

No. 2, which dealt with oil and gas well assessment to consider a well's production when valuing it for property tax, passed with 62 percent.

No. 3, which allows the State's Rainy Day Fund to be used after a federally declared disaster, passed 55-45 percent.

No. 4, which created a new State spending limit to project slower growth, failed 56-44 percent.

No. 5, which would have given manufacturers and local governments the option to schedule payments in lieu of property taxes for industrial expansion, failed 63-37 percent.

No. 6, which expands eligible property owners with higher incomes to have their taxes frozen, passed 62-38 percent.

Sports Wagering

The proposition to allow all sports betting in a given parish where voters approved it passed in 55 of 64 parishes. However, now the Gaming Control Board must develop rules and regulations for the industry and a licensing process, which will likely delay implementation for two years.

For all other election results in Louisiana, you can visit at www.sos.la.gov.

LA DOTD Survey

Louisiana DOTD's Office of Multimodal Commerce has kicked off its survey of Louisiana ports. Most of you should likely have or will soon receive a survey from DOTD's Chris Collins on behalf of Moffatt & Nichol, which is conducting a survey in the development of a new Waterway Transportation Plan. The survey aims to understand the challenges facing Louisiana ports and where public and private investment would have the greatest impact. The survey and economic analysis are tools to be used by the DOTD and stakeholders to validate public and private investment and guide legislative policy that could benefit port and waterborne commerce.

Gas Tax Effort to Kickoff

The Louisiana Coalition to Fix Our Roads, which PAL has supported, will hold its annual membership meeting Nov. 11 from 1-3 p.m. at LABI's new office in Baton Rouge. The organization will unveil a new "strategy for success" in the 2021 Regular Legislative Session. Legislative supporters of the plan will be in attendance, as well as consultants. The organization is now more than 100-members strong and includes chambers of commerce from around the State, along with regional ECOs, transportation companies and shippers.

On the Hill...

While it appears Republicans have retained a slim majority in the Senate and picked up seats in the House, a few key members of committees critical to ports and waterways had hard fought campaigns but survived to keep their seats.

Veteran Democratic Rep. Peter DeFazio, who chairs the House Transportation Committee, narrowly defeated Republican challenger Alek Skarlatos in Oregon's 4th District, by about 25,000 votes or 52 percent. The Committee ranking Republican Rep. Rodney Davis, who chairs the House Transportation Highways and Transit Subcommittee, won with 54 percent of the vote.

Cruise Industry Remains in Port

While the CDC had given the cruise industry an Oct. 31 date to allow cruises to resume, cruise lines have voluntarily postponed a resumption of business until January 2021. Cruise operators say they need the extra time to prepare for extensive COVID-19 testing protocols, sanitation and crew repatriation. According to cruise lines, they want to make the most of their initial shot at resumption of service, as they fear restarting and having to shut down again. Cruises, both oceangoing and riverine, were suspended in March and left cruise ports with significant revenue shortfalls, along with the communities they visit. The 1.3 million passengers that moved through Louisiana in 2019 spent an estimated \$250 million in the State, according to a 2018 LSU survey. River towns and attractions in St. James, St. John, East Baton Rouge and West Feliciana parishes have also felt the crunch due to the shuttering of inland cruises, which visit those communities.

The Rest of the Story...

We will wait to see who ends up where to discuss the timing of a WRDA bill passage, a potential COVID Relief package (which Sen. McConnell wants by the end of the year), and any infrastructure package efforts. Until then, the federal government is operating on a Continuing Resolution until Dec. 11.