

When I moved from Algiers Point back to the east bank of New Orleans in February 2008, I wondered how many more times I could cross the Mississippi River before the toll tag on my windshield ran out. I guess I'll never know.

Last week, **tolls** on the Crescent City Connection were suspended after a Baton Rouge **judge** threw out the results of a toll renewal approved by voters in November.

I had last crossed the bridge Feb. 2, the Saturday before the Super Bowl. And as I've done most times since February 2008, I rolled down my window, slowed to a crawl and prepared to fork over a dollar. But there was no need. A green light beckoned me to drive on through. And so I did.

Opponents of the **tolls** never had to convince me that the bridge was being mismanaged. I knew it had to be. I hadn't put any money on my toll tag in five years. The credit card linked to the toll tag expired soon after I moved back to the east bank, but as recently as February I was still cruising through the toll booths with a dollar still in my hand.

I voted against the toll renewal, though, truth be told, I didn't think I had any business voting on the issue. The Louisiana Legislature should have had the decency to abolish the **tolls** after the collections paid off the cost of the bridge. They did not.

If members of the Legislature were too cowardly to get rid of the **tolls** themselves, they should at least have limited the vote to those motorists most likely to pay the **tolls**: West Bankers in Orleans, Jefferson and Plaquemines parishes.

Instead, lawmakers extended the vote to people who rarely -- if ever -- have to pay the cost of crossing the bridge. I doubt so many people on the east bank would have voted to continue the collection of **tolls** if they had to dig into their pockets and ashtrays to go about their daily business.

Support for the **tolls** was strongest on the east bank of New Orleans, where 57 percent of voters approved extending the **tolls**. Richard Campanella, a geographer at Tulane, said in a November op-ed for this newspaper that east bank support and West Bank opposition highlighted the differences between those who have to drive the bridge and those who don't.

It shows, he said, "that West Bankers generally have a 'have to' relationship with the east bank, and travel there mostly out of pure necessity, oftentimes daily. Those on the east bank, on the other hand, are more likely go West for 'want to' reasons, and/or only occasionally. So it makes perfect sense that the West Bank would seek to relieve itself of the daily toll burden while the east bank is content to preserve the status quo."

Toll abolitionists didn't give up when the **tolls** were renewed by the narrowest of margins. Their call for a limited recount didn't turn things their way. In fact, the margin of victory in favor of the **tolls** grew from 18 to 36.

But opponents were able to persuade **Judge** William Morvant that more than 1,000 registered voters who were handed provisional ballots Election Day had been wrongly denied their chance to vote on the measure.

Voters are given provisional ballots when there's a dispute concerning their registration, but even then, they're only allowed to vote in federal elections.

A Jefferson Parish election official testified that at least 90 eligible voters were deemed ineligible and given provisional ballots. An Orleans Parish poll commissioner testified that on his watch, eight voters were given the limited ballot. He couldn't reach anybody locally or in Baton Rouge to give those voters assistance, he said.

Morvant ordered a new election to be held May 4. We won't be voting for president in May, so we can be assured that there will be far fewer people at the polls than there were in November. In some parishes, the toll proposition could be the only thing on the ballot.

We can also assume that those who want the tolls ended will be more motivated than those who want to extend them.

Because I live on this side of the river, I don't think I ought to be voting in that election, but I'll vote against them all the same. By this time, I've gotten used to the idea of crossing the bridge for free.

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