

Landslide rejecting Crescent City Connection tolls - Times-Picayune, The: Web Edition Articles (New Orleans, LA) - May 6, 2013

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Last November, voters in Jefferson, Orleans and Plaquemines parishes approved a 20-year extension of the **Crescent City Connection** tolls by a scant 18 votes out of the more than 308,000 cast. Given a rare chance for a do-over Saturday, opponents rallied and soundly rejected the measure without any of November's drama.

Though the voter turnout was significantly smaller this time around, those who did show up at the polls did so with 'No' in mind, thrashing the CCC referendum with nearly 80 percent of the vote and taking down three seemingly routine tax renewals in Jefferson Parish. The CCC vote was 75,926 against the tolls, 22,111 for the tolls, according to the Louisiana Secretary of State's office.

"Voters are very selective especially in a tight economic environment," said political pollster Silas Lee. "You can never assume that something will automatically pass or fail without working for it."

Opponents of the tolls attributed better organization, funding and a major political blunder for driving residents, especially on the West Bank, to the polls.

Lee observed that the political momentum quickly swung in favor of opponents after the precedent-setting ruling by a Baton Rouge judge March 5 that set the stage for a new election. Judge William Morvant found that a number of legally registered voters were denied the ability to vote on the CCC issue when they were given federal provisional ballots in November and tossed those results.

Business and political leaders mounted a \$250,000 campaign of radio, television and direct mail advertising prior to the November referendum. They were largely silent this time around.

"That changed everything. You didn't see any visibility from supporters," Lee said. "The opponents had more visibility that made a tremendous difference."

Attorney **G. Patrick Hand III**, who represented Mike Teachworth of Harvey in the lawsuit that forced Saturday's election, said toll opponents focused on getting out the West Bank vote. Their campaign surged after the decorative lights on the bridge were disconnected just days after Morvant's ruling, Hand said.

The Regional Planning Commission voted to use transition money to pay for costs including mowing, litter pick up and utilities for the 13-mile corridor, but excluded the ornamental lamps that illuminate the iconic span as part of the night-time skyline.

Hand said residents on both sides of the river viewed that move as retribution from politicians for West Bank residents' anti-toll stance and a public rejection of private money to keep on the decorative lights.

"That pushed a lot of people over the edge," he said. "It angered people to get out and end this thing...We would have won it without that event. It was a clear scare tactic. It was punishment. We're going to punish you for being good citizens."

The decorative lights saga prompted residents to volunteer, distribute signs, email their friends and give money, Hand said. Anti-toll leaders also spoke to civic and elected officials and canvassed neighborhoods, he said.

Each election is a new campaign, according to Lee.

"You can't take anything for granted," he said. "Public sentiment was on their side."

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