

Opponents of Crescent City Connection tolls ask - Times-Picayune, The: Web Edition Articles (New Orleans, LA) - November 20, 2012

November 20, 2012 | Times-Picayune, The: Web Edition Articles (New Orleans, LA) | Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com

Two groups that campaigned against continuing tolls on the Crescent City Connection have asked the Jefferson Parish Council and Parish President John Young to formally contest the results of the Nov. 6 referendum, which extended the tolls by a mere 18-vote margin. Stop the Tolls and the Voters League of Unincorporated West Jefferson contend a formal canvass of the election results is the only way to instill confidence in the outcome.

Stop the Tolls organizer **Mike Teachworth** and Wade Perrin, chairman of the Voters League, both wrote letters to council members and Young, stressing Jefferson voters rejection of the measure.

"If not reversed, this unfair bridge tax, over its 20 year duration, will take close to a quarter of a billion dollars out of the economy of Jefferson Parish," Teachworth wrote. "This after Jefferson Parish has already paid in \$200M for the CCC over the last 24 years, and while all other Mississippi River bridges in our state are fully funded by the state with no toll tax imposed on them."

The tolls, which east bank-bound motorists pay 40 cents with a toll tag or \$1 cash, generate \$21 million annually.

During the debate leading up to the Nov. 6 vote, the council and Young took opposing positions, with council members supporting the 20-year extension. Several council members stood with area law enforcement chiefs and Bridging Progress, a political action committee backed by business advocacy groups, who cited public safety and economic development as reasons for extending the tolls.

Young argued the state is legally obligated to maintain the bridge, making the tolls unnecessary.

Plaquemines Parish joined Jefferson in opposing the measure, while Orleans Parish voters, with the exception of Algiers, favored the extension.

Criticism and anger have persisted since the Nov. 6 vote, which stretched into the early morning hours of Nov. 7, while Orleans elections officials counted more than 24,000 ballots cast during early voting. After that tally, a scant eight-vote margin leaned toward approval, until Orleans elections officials completed the tally a week ago, counting 20 military and overseas ballots. That left a final margin of 16 votes for the measure.

Perrin called on Jefferson's elected officials, including the parish's legislative delegation, to contest the outcome, reminding them they "swore" to represent parish residents.

"It is imperative the electorate has complete confidence in any election, especially one that imposes a nearly one-half billion dollar tax primarily upon the Westbank population of the Greater New Orleans region over the next 20 years," Perrin wrote. "It is obscene that such an immense

measure, voted upon by approximately 310,000 people, should be levied upon your constituents by a highly questionable margin of only 16 votes."

Teachworth said the litigation is the only way to ensure that "no errors had occurred in this tabulation" and "in order to confirm the accuracy of the Orleans Parish vote and to protect its citizens."

Check back with NOLA.com for additional updates.

Copyright, 2012, Times-Picayune. All Rights Reserved.