

=====
Local voter rolls swell - Numbers near record ahead of fall contests
=====

Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA)-August 22, 2008

Author: Ed Anderson

Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE -- The voter rolls have grown by more than 57,000 new registrants since the Oct. 20 gubernatorial race, with the largest gains among Republican and African-American voters, according to figures released this week by Secretary of State Jay Dardenne's office.

Through Tuesday, 57,304 new voters are eligible to vote in the Nov. 4 presidential election. The deadline to sign up for that election is Oct. 6, Dardenne spokesman Jacques Berry said. The last day to qualify for the Oct. 4 elections is Sept. 3.

To date, 2,884,075 voters are eligible to cast ballots in that race and the U.S. Senate race, nearing the largest number of voters ever registered, Berry said. That came in 2006, when 2,893,674 voters were on the rolls. When the books were closed on the governor's race last year, 2,826,771 voters were registered.

Spokesmen for the state Democratic and Republican parties said that as the Oct. 6 voter registration deadline nears they expect those numbers to jump more.

Since the governor's race, the largest growth came among African-American voters, who added 32,500 new registrants to the rolls, compared to 18,538 new white voters and 6,266 who are of other ethnic backgrounds.

A total of 28,737 new GOP voters have signed up to vote, bringing the total to 725,797, an increase from 697,060 last fall. The Democrats added 17,685 new voters, going from 1,499,736 to 1,517,421. The number of independents increased by almost 11,000 -- from 629,975 to 640,857.

--- St. Tammany sees gains ---

In the New Orleans area, the largest net gain of voters was in heavily GOP St. Tammany Parish where registration grew by almost 5,548 voters, with the addition of about 4,000 Republicans. More than 1,000 new voters signed up in St. Tammany as independents -- not affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party -- while Democrats added more than 500 new voters to the rolls.

St. Tammany was one of four area parishes to gain voters, while three others lost voters.

Jefferson Parish showed a net gain of 4,454 voters since the governor's race last fall; St. John the Baptist Parish gained 959 voters and St. Charles Parish gained 831.

The parishes that saw the biggest drops in population after Hurricane Katrina -- Orleans, Plaquemines and St. Bernard -- showed slight declines in voters.

Orleans is down 1,135 voters from last fall's election. St. Bernard is off 1,974, and Plaquemines is down 498.

--- Political parties pushing ---

Britton Loftin, executive director of the state Democratic Party, said he

anticipates that more voters in the state will sign up after the political conventions, which are taking place during the next two weeks. While some may be energized by the presidential candidates for president, all levels of candidates are pushing citizens to register.

"Judicial candidates are registering people to vote. Mayoral candidates are registering people to vote," not just national candidates and congressional candidates, Loftin said. He said the party is encouraging its local political arms, such as parish executive committees and members of its statewide governing board, the Democratic State Central Committee, to help sign up voters.

Aaron Baer, communications director for the state GOP, said the party is working with its local political entities to get voters to switch parties or to sign up new voters as GOP members. In the New Orleans area, party officials have worked with Hispanic groups to add new Republicans to the fold.

"We have talked to several . . . parishes about helping them" register additional GOP members, Baer said, but declined to be more specific.

.

Ed Anderson can be reached at eanderson@timespicayune.com or 225.342.5810.

Section: NATIONAL
Page: 02

Record Number: 423652702
Copyright, 2008, The Times-Picayune Publishing Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Used by NewsBank with Permission.