The election on Nov. 6 is of utmost importance as we elect our President of the United States.

In addition, there are other items on the ballot, including a vote on nine constitutional amendments. People often tell me they are difficult to understand, so I hope to shed some light with a brief explanation in this column and a following column. There has been legislation that now requires the language of the amendments to be clearer to ask you whether you can support it or not, so hopefully there should not be confusion with these amendments as in past years.

I agree that we amend our state constitution too much, however, there are issues that legally require us to amend the Louisiana Constitution if we want to make changes and/or protect things in our Great State.

Proposed Amendment No. 1
Do you support an amendment to prohibit monies in the Medicaid Trust Fund for the Elderly from being used or appropriated for other purposes when adjustments are made to eliminate a state deficit?

I plan to vote yes. After having witnessed the sweeping of funds from statutory dedicated accounts to stabilize the budget shortfall, we need to protect the Medicaid Trust Fund account from being considered to be used in the future to stabilize the budget.

Proposed Amendment No. 2
Do you support an amendment to the Constitution of the State of Louisiana to provide that the right to keep and bear arms is a fundamental right and any restriction of that right requires the highest standard of review by a court?

I suggest a yes vote. We need to make our Louisiana Constitution stronger on our right to keep and bear arms. Our current rights to keep and bear arms continue to be challenged in the court system and threatened by decisions made by some judicial court rulings. Heller and McDonald, being decided by only a one vote majority by the U.S. Supreme Court, is a warning to us that we must defend our right to keep and bear arms. With the passage of this amendment, Louisiana will have the strongest constitutional language of any state. It will raise the level of any restrictions on this right to “strict scrutiny,” which is the highest level of judicial review.

Proposed Amendment No. 3
Do you support an amendment to require legislation effecting any change to laws concerning retirement systems for public employees that is to be prefiled to be filed no later than forty-five days before the start of a regular legislative session and to require the completion of public notice requirements regarding legislation effecting such a change no later than sixty days before introduction of the bill?

I am voting no on this amendment. We have a problem with the $18.5 billion unfunded liability of our state retirement systems and changes are going to have to be made to ensure the fiscal soundness of the retirement systems for the retired state employees and retired teachers. We must protect the retirement system from the train wreck coming, and if no changes are made to the retirement systems, devastation will occur. This amendment will make it more difficult for legislation to be introduced to even be considered by the Legislature. For example, if this amendment passes, I would have had only two days after I was sworn in as a new state senator to advertise my intention to introduce legislation affecting retirement issues in Louisiana. This amendment needs to be voted down and not put in the constitution.

Proposed Amendment No. 4
Do you support an amendment to exempt from ad valorem taxation, in addition to the homestead exemption, the next seventy-five thousand dollars of value of property owned and occupied by the spouse of a deceased veteran with a service-connected disability rating of one hundred percent who passed away prior to the enactment of the exemption?

I am voting yes on Amendment 4. This a housekeeping amendment for a constitutional amendment passed in November 2010 that simply covers the spouse of a deceased veteran with a service-connected disability. A widow or widower of a veteran should be allowed the benefits given a veteran had the veteran been able to qualify for the additional homestead exemption before he or she passed away.

Proposed Amendment No. 5
Do you support an amendment to provide for the forfeiture of public retirement benefits by any public servant who is convicted of a felony associated with and committed during his public service?

I am voting yes. Anyone who commits a felony crime involving his/her employment as a public servant and is convicted should lose his/her retirement benefits. This does not apply to crimes outside a public servant's role of employment, but applies to those whose job as a public servant put him or her in a position to commit a crime. If a public servant commits a felony in his/her job/employment, then he or she should not get the benefit of the public retirement benefits provided by the State of Louisiana.

I will cover the other four amendments in a future column.

Barrow Peacock serves the 37th District in the Louisiana Senate.