Citizen Feed-Back Important In Drafting Constitution

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EDITOR'S NOTE — This is third in a series on the Louisiana Constitutional Convention printed as a public service and prepared by the League of Women Voters to give nonpartisan information about the convention.

A total of $2,340,000 has been appropriated for the Louisiana Constitutional Convention meeting in Baton Rouge to write an up-to-date constitution for the state. This sum represents a "vested interest" of the entire population of Louisiana.

When the new constitution is completed and the governor calls an election, voters will make the decision about its adoption. There will possibly be as many as six alternate provisions on controversial issues, giving the voter some choices. However, on the basic document the vote will be a simple and final "Yes" or "No".

The importance of citizen feedback in producing a constitution which voters will adopt was emphasized by Dr. Rubin Cohn who served on the successful Illinois Constitutional Convention. He said that in order for the public to understand and support a new constitution and ultimately vote favorably at the polls the committees of the convention must make themselves "open and free". In speaking to the delegates of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention, Cohn said, "Have a convention open to every segment of the population. An atmosphere of really listening to the people is essential."

Ample Provision

Rules of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention make ample provision for committees to hear the public. Rule No. 15 reads, "... all meetings of the convention shall be open to the public and the news media." Other rules require publicizing of the time and place of meetings and state that printed material shall be available to the public. For a copy of the rules write: CC/73 Public Information, Box 17740-A, Baton Rouge, 70803.

The convention is organized along the lines of the legislature with permanent officers and standing committees. Procedures in the committees and at the full sessions are based on Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedures.

The chairman, 37-year-old E. Henry, elected from Jonesboro, is also the current Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives. As convention chairman one of his duties is to preside at the full sessions. He is also chairman of the Executive Committee which has the responsibility for the budget, purchases, personnel, meeting places and other administrative details, and is an ex-officio and nonvoting member of all article-writing committees.