

York County casino, Medicaid expansion at stake as Maine heads to polls

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 07 November 2017 09:56 -

Mainers are heading to the polls Tuesday to decide whether Maine expands Medicaid health coverage to an estimated 70,000 residents and whether the state should allow an international businessman to build a new casino in York County.

Voters in Lewiston and Auburn are deciding whether to merge their cities, and voters in Portland are having their say on rent limits, zoning reform, school renovations and a hotly contested City Council race.

And around the state, voters will decide on local ballot questions and races for town councils, select boards and school boards.

Most polling places in Maine open at 7 or 8 a.m., but times vary by community. All Maine polls close at 8 p.m.

It's still not too late to register to vote. Mainers who are 18 or older can register at polling places on Election Day.

Residents in towns and cities across Maine can look up the location of their polling place and the candidates on their local ballots on Maine.gov.

Results of the state and local elections, as well as elections of note in other part of the country, will be updated and posted at pressherald.com as the numbers come in after the polls close. The website also will feature interactive maps showing town-by-town voting results statewide. Results also will be published Wednesday morning in the Portland Press Herald.

Here is a guide to some of the big decisions voters are making.

CASINO LEADS STATE BALLOT

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Question 1 on the state ballot is seeking voter approval for a third casino in Maine, which would be built somewhere in York County.

The referendum is written to allow only one person, Shawn Scott, to apply for a permit to build the casino. Supporters have argued a casino in York County would create more than 2,000 permanent jobs and generate \$45 million in annual tax revenue, projections that have been dismissed by critics of gambling as an economic development tool.

The controversial campaign was the subject of a probe by the Maine Ethics Commission for violating state campaign finance laws by failing to disclose the true source of its funds and by missing deadlines to file reports; on Friday, the commission levied \$500,000 in fines against the four committees behind the referendum for those violations.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Expanding eligibility for MaineCare, the state's Medicaid health insurance program, is Question 2 on the state ballot.

Maine will be the first state in the nation to weigh in on Medicaid expansion by referendum. It is among 19 states whose legislators or governors have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Republican Gov. Paul LePage has vetoed Medicaid expansion five times, which led to the effort by supporters to put the issue on the ballot.

Supporters of expansion have said it would give health care coverage to about 70,000 low-income Mainers and help struggling rural hospitals gain better financial footing. About 265,000 Mainers currently have Medicaid. Opponents argue that hospitals would benefit at the expense of Maine taxpayers.

BOND ISSUE AND PENSION REFORM

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Question 3 on the state ballot seeks approval for [a \\$105 million bond](#) to fund repairs and improvements to the state's transportation infrastructure. The bulk of the money would be directed to repair priority roads and bridges. Dollars would also be allocated for the state's sea and air ports, freight and passenger railroads and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Question 4 is a proposed constitutional amendment dealing with amortization of losses to the state's pension fund. Currently, the state has 10 years to pay back any unfunded liability that was created by investment losses. Question 4 would increase that timeline to 20 years, which the state says would insulate the system from shifts in the economy.

Portland RENT LIMITS

Question 1 on the Portland city ballot would limit annual rent increases to the rate of inflation and create a rent board to oversee rent increases and evictions; mediate disputes between renters and landlords; and assess fines for ordinance violations, among other things.

Supporters claim the proposal would preserve affordable housing and economic diversity in Portland's tight rental market. But local landlords warn the proposal would stymie development, and affordable housing agencies worry the changes would make it more difficult for low-income and homeless people to find a landlord willing to rent to them.

NEW REZONING RULES

Question 2 on the Portland ballot would give residents the power to block changes to land-use rules if 25 percent of the registered voters who reside or own property within 500 feet of the zoning change sign a petition in opposition.

Supporters believe the ordinance is needed to give neighborhood residents more power to negotiate with real estate developers and city officials. Opponents say it would undermine the public process and give a small group of people the power to stop developments that could benefit the city as a whole.

RENOVATING SCHOOLS

In Portland's Questions 3 and 4, voters will have a choice in how to move forward with renovations in the city's aging elementary schools.

Question 3 is a \$64 million bond that would use local tax dollars to renovate four schools. Question 4 is a \$32 million bond to renovate two schools while seeking state funding for the other two.

If both questions receive more than 50 percent of the vote, the question with more "yes" votes will win. If both get a majority and the same number of "yes" votes, the question with fewer "no" votes will be enacted.

LEWISTON-AUBURN MERGER

Voters in Lewiston and Auburn are voting whether to merge their two cities, something they have discussed for years. If passed by both cities, the measure would initiate a two-year transition process and lead to a new city starting on Jan. 2, 2020.

Supporters argue it would save money for residents of both cities, and the unified city could attract more young professionals to fill a workforce shortage. Opponents worry about losing a sense of identity and question whether the savings would be as promised.

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