**Voters Approve More State Debt**

By [Pamela M. Prah](http://www.pewstates.org/projects/stateline/about#pamela-m-prah), Staff Writer

Even as storm-weary New Jerseyans struggled to find polling places, voters there overwhelmingly approved the state’s first bond measure to support higher education in 24 years. The measure lets the state borrow $750 million to upgrade and build new facilities at the state’s public and private colleges and universities.

The ballot measure in New Jersey was one of a handful voters approved in statewide bond measures on the ballot November 6. Voters in Arkansas, for example, approved this year’s largest statewide bond measure, which will levy a 0.5 percent sales tax to fund a $1.3 billion bond issue for roads. Likewise, voters in Alaska endorsed borrowing $453 million for transportation.

New Jersey's initiative was a priority of Governor Chris Christie and part of his dramatic effort to [overhaul higher education](http://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/552012/approved/20120822a.html). The money will be used to build or improve academic buildings, laboratories and libraries, but not athletic facilities. It excludes institutions with endowments over $1 billion, namely Princeton.

Before the vote, at least one anti-tax group urged the sponsors of the bond to rescind the measure in the wake of the damage caused by Hurricane Sandy. “New Jersey is broke and tens of billions of dollars in debt,” said Steve Lonegan, state director at Americans for Prosperity-New Jersey.

“Now is not the time for the state to be recklessly borrowing $750 million to erect more ivory towers on college campuses,” Lonegan [said](http://americansforprosperity.org/new-jersey/newsroom/pr-in-wake-of-sandy-lonegan-calls-on-senators-kean-and-sweeney-to-rescind-support-of-750-million-bond-issue/) in a statement earlier in the week.

Another governor who successfully stumped for a bond measure was Alabama Governor Robert Bentley. Voters there approved allowing the state to sell additional bonds, which the governor [said](http://www.governor.alabama.gov/news/news_detail.aspx?ID=7237) Tuesday “will help the state attract more jobs from new and expanding industries.” The measure keeps the state’s bond limit at its current level of $750 million, but allows the state to re-issue new bonds as the existing bonds are paid off.

Nationwide, voters in 38 states considered 174 statewide ballot measures, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures’ ballot [database](http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/ballot-measures-database.aspx). For an overview of some of the controversial measuresthat appeared in multiple states, including gay marriage and marijuana, see *Stateline’s*[Infographic](http://www.pewstates.org/projects/stateline/headlines/ballot-measures-give-voters-say-on-divisive-issues-85899425767).

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