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School property tax elimination: What else needs to happen?

By Rep. Sam Rohrer



When I began the fight for school property tax elimination, school taxes were a crushing burden on homeowners. Property taxes were the single biggest cost imposed on many of Pennsylvania's residents. Today, not only has the property tax burden continued to mount, we have seen an increase in many of the costs of day-to-day living. Now we must factor into our budgets increased gas prices; increased milk, bread, and egg prices; and increased energy prices. These items only add to an increasingly heavy load.

What else needs to happen before the governor and the Legislature take notice of the plight of millions of Pennsylvanians and do something to alleviate it? Gov.

Rendell's Act 1, touted as a significant reprieve, has dismally fallen short of its promises.

The gambling money has barely covered the increase of property taxes from this past year, and in many places failed to meet even the projected 10 percent promise.

Chuck Ardo, Gov. Rendell's spokesperson, responded to our June "Save Our Homes" rally by saying that because of gaming revenues, "It's unlikely that seniors across the Commonwealth are bearing an undue burden." My response is, "Unlikely? You've got to be kidding." The hundreds of letters, e-mails, and phone calls, as well as the recent front-page news stories about seniors losing their homes, seriously belie Mr. Ardo's statement.

With a governor that chooses not to understand this pressing problem, what else needs to happen before we take action?

What else needs to happen before we face the financial hardship that is causing citizens to lose their homes-homes that these good people have lived in for 30, 40, even 50 years? Giving housing subsidies just raises different taxes for citizens. Gambling money has already failed to fulfill expectations. Granting more money to schools without spending reform leaves them hungry for even more. I ask again, what else needs to happen before we take action?

What else needs to happen before legislators in both the House and the Senate take decisive action on property tax elimination? "Reform" simply does not satisfy the citizens who are seeing increased millage on their tax forms but seeing no increase in their checking accounts from Act 1. Eliminating property taxes is the only real way to relieve citizens of this burden. What else needs to happen before we take action?

Unfortunately, the actions of the Legislature and the governor seem to say that more pain, more difficulty, and more foreclosures are needed before they finally respond to the gravity of this situation.

I believe that we must take proactive action. When I began this fight, it was an effort to address a known problem, and I knew that it would get worse. And instead of just talking about school, property tax reform, I posed a solution to bring about 100 percent elimination. How many fewer foreclosures would have taken place in these past five years? How many fewer sheriff sales; how much more peace of mind?

We cannot, however, dwell on what has happened before. Today, we need to resolve not to let another five years of foreclosures and sheriff sales happen as a result of inaction. The Legislature has too many people who seem only to react when a problem gets "bad enough." We, however, cannot be content to wait until that indeterminate day arrives. We must act now, and so I ask again - what else needs to happen?

Nothing else that is satisfactory can happen except action. As legislators, we are charged with protecting the rights of every citizen in Pennsylvania. We are to serve you, and make laws that are in your best interests. By ignoring this issue that reaches across the state, in rural and urban areas, the legislators and governor are failing you if they do not act.

House Bill 1275, the School Property Tax Elimination Act, is that answer.

House Bill 1275 would eliminate school property taxes with a constitutional amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution that would guarantee an abolition of property taxes (House Bill 2199). House Bill 1275 would then freeze and phase out property taxes in a workable, realistic, and effective manner. It would sufficiently provide alternative funds to maintain Pennsylvania's schools and education system.

If you are also not content to wait, please go to www.ptcc.us, to access the grassroots organization Pennsylvania Taxpayers Cyber Coalition's (PTCC) website against property tax. The PTCC is collecting stories of homeowners, and is also hoping to begin taping live interviews. You can also download and distribute petitions in support of House Bill 1275.

Finally, to further ensure final passage of the constitutional amendment, encourage your family and friends to call their legislators in both the House and the Senate and ask them-what else needs to happen before you take action and pass House Bill 1275 and House Bill 2199?

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