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 Thursday, January 25, 2007

Task Force recommends changes to property tax appraisals
 Updated: 1/24/2007 9:46 AM
 By: Veronica Castelo



Gov. Rick Perry

South Austin homeowner Mike Dolan said his property taxes and appraisals go up substantially every year.

"The house has stayed the same, but the property has gone up. I eventually don't know if I'll be able to afford to live here," Dolan said.

Dolan is not the only one feeling the pinch. Texas taxpayers pay

the ninth highest property taxes in the country, according to the Texas Task Force on Appraisal Reform. Gov. Rick Perry said the property tax system is flawed.

"There is nothing fair about property tax bills increasing 233 percent across Texas in less than 20 years," Perry said.

In an effort to tackle this problem, Perry appointed Tom Pauken to lead the 14 member Task Force. The Task Force held 11 public hearings throughout the state where hundreds of home and business owners, city leaders, and public officials expressed their concerns.

"We've had a lot of frustration on the part of taxpayers, property owners, and people who go through that process and don't think it's a fair process," Pauken said.

The Task Force is recommending lawmakers pass five key statutory changes and two constitutional amendments. Some of the changes are aimed at improving the fairness of the appraisal process.

The task force suggests adding taxpayer representatives to the appraisal review board of directors, allowing taxpayers more time to contest a tax assessment, and providing more information for taxpayers about the appraisal process.

Another recommendation, and one already being debated, limits government spending at the local level by lowering revenue growth caps from 8 percent to 5 percent.

Dick Lavine with the [Center for Public Policy Priorities](#) said the cap leaves local officials unable to meet local needs.

"They need to pay for new police, new fire, new EMS for all those people. This rollback rate would keep them from taking care of their residents," Lavine said.

Byron Schlomach, chief economist for the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), disagrees with Lavine. He said the report provides a framework to achieve true taxpayer protection.


"Government spending is fundamentally the problem. It's perfectly justified to have that kind of a limit," Schlomach said.

Perry said specifics still need to be worked out before legislators can move forward with any reform; however, he said the recommendations provide greater fairness to the property tax appraisal system.

"If Texans are going to be taxed every year on the same property


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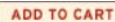
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Property taxes

The task force recommended measures to lower property taxes for Texas homeowners.

there at least needs to be a belief among the public that every precaution is being made to keep their tax bills from rising faster than needed," Perry said.

Taxpayers like Dolan don't feel that way. He said he hopes lawmakers are willing to reform the system so that one day he will.

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