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Editorial: Follow the auditors



Elimination of property taxes in Ohio is more than a dubious campaign promise from the state GOP endorsed candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. It may just be on the ballot in November.

A group calling itself Citizens for Property Tax Reform has launched a drive to acquire the 413,487 valid voter signatures needed by July 2 for a question to appear on the ballot proposing to end property tax statewide in a year.

Property tax revenue provides 66 percent of the revenue that pays for local government, schools, libraries, parks, transit systems, and emergency services. Its loss in Ohio would be catastrophic.

Like Mr. Ramaswamy, Citizens for Property Tax Reform have no explanation for how to replace more than \$20 billion.

Property taxes have pushed many voters to anger because the Ohio General Assembly has allocated no resources to help.

The House passed budget forces refunds on property taxes if recipients of the levy money have cash reserves totaling more than 30 percent of their budget. Lawmakers claim it will be the biggest property tax cut in Ohio history..

There are often very legitimate reasons for a large reserve fund. Instead of property tax refunds lawmakers are more likely to prompt inopportune spending by penalizing keeping money in a rainy day fund.

Legislators and gubernatorial candidates would be wise to follow the good plan presented by the County Auditors Association of Ohio because it balances the interests of individual taxpayers and local governments to restore the economic equilibrium.

The homestead program for Ohio's seniors and disabled should increase the value of the property exempted from taxation and the income eligibility should be lifted considerably higher.

Too many retired Ohioans are stuck in valuable homes without sufficient personal income to pay the property tax.

At the same time the increase in revenue which school districts can take in because of the 20-mill floor in Ohio law needs to be limited.

Property taxes for schools are not allowed to fall below 20 mills when levies adjust for higher real estate values. At present, more than two-thirds of Ohio is at the 20-mill limit, so most schools reap an uncapped windfall when valuations are reset.

The auditors suggest bumping up the benefit of the owner-occupied tax credit and some programs for low-income homeowners, but they're adamant that nothing will work until the budget-busting bills sent to homeowners where the 20-mill floor prohibits any adjustment is addressed.

State lawmakers appear to be more interested in providing funds for billionaire NFL owners for stadium upgrades in Cleveland and Cincinnati than fixing the rapidly failing property tax system that touches every homeowner and community in Ohio.

If legislators continue to ignore the problem they risk the chaos of a voter-passed constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes or election of a governor pledged to do away with the tax.

The county auditors have put together a plan the General Assembly should pass immediately.

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