

<http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/why-public-schools-are-leery-of-eliminating-property-taxes>

Why public schools are leery of eliminating property taxes

Sunday March 12, 2017 12:01 AM

Written by David Mekeel

For the past five years, Dr. Randall A. Grove and his brethren have been fighting an uphill battle.

Like the leaders of most schools across the state, the Conrad Weiser superintendent has faced stagnant resources and skyrocketing costs. And, Grove said, the specter of overhauling how local school districts raise money has him worried that more tough times could be on the horizon.

"We're at the point now where the next big cut will be getting rid of programs," he said.

Grove was one of a handful of local superintendents, joined by officials from the Berks County Intermediate Unit, who held a joint press conference in January to share their concerns about proposals to eliminate school property taxes. The issue is expected to be taken up again this spring by the state legislature.

The educators had a laundry list of worries, including the stability of a new system, a loss of local control over funding and the danger of entrenching inequitable funding between rich and poor districts.

Sitting in his office a few weeks after the press conference, Grove said he understands that school property taxes are a burden, especially for retired residents on fixed incomes.

But he said he's worried those fighting to eliminate property taxes are trying to fix a narrow blemish with a wide brush.

"I wish they would approach it with a laser focus," he said. "And instead they're going to use a shotgun."

Grove said he would like to see a change to the homestead property tax reduction plan where reductions are handed out based on need, a move he said would help ease the burden on seniors. That, however, would take a change to the state Constitution.

Grove acknowledged that there's a problem with school funding, one that has been causing districts across the state to raise tax rates. But it's being driven by expenses districts have no control over, he said.

Is it about overreliance?

In Conrad Weiser, between the 2011-12 and 2015-16 school years, the amount the district has had to put into the state-run retirement system for school employees has increased at a much higher rate than state funding. The difference between the two over that span is just under \$1.3 million.

During that same time, special education costs have outpaced state funding by almost \$1.4 million, Grove said.

The nearly \$2.7 million that increases in those two areas topped state funding increases has to be made up for through property taxes, Grove said. And that's just two items among several - including charter school costs, contracted salaries and others - that need to be accounted for.

Grove said the result has been constant trimming, to the point where there's not much more to cut before severely impacting students in the classroom.

Just this week, the Boyertown School Board announced the district is investigating closing down Pine Forge Elementary School as a cost-cutting measure to close a projected \$4 million gap in its budget for next school year.

Wythe Keever, spokesman for the Pennsylvania State Education Association, echoed Grove's take on education funding. He said that if the state stepped up its efforts to fund education it would provide relief from school property taxes.

"We would like to see a shift of focus towards how to increase the state share of public school funding instead of these sweeping solutions with all the unintended consequences," he said.

Keever said Pennsylvania ranks 46th in the nation when it comes to the state's share of public school funding, with state dollars accounting for only about 36 percent of overall education funding.

"That creates enormous pressure in some school districts on property owners," he said. "In our view the property tax is not the issue, although no one likes having to pay the property tax. The overreliance on the property tax is the real issue.

"Increasing the state share of education funding is the best relief."

With schools already on shaky financial grounds, Grove said, the idea of taking away school property taxes in exchange for something else is frightening. Especially when that something else is an earned income and sales tax.

The problem, Grove said, is that while property taxes tend to be a pretty steady source of revenue, earned income and sales taxes will fluctuate with the health of the economy.

"Earned income tax and sales tax are the most elastic taxes that are out there, and school property tax is the most inelastic," he said. "What happens if the economy tanks? What do you do?"

Meeting higher costs

David Baldinger, president of the Pennsylvania Taxpayers Cyber Coalition and the man behind recent school property tax elimination bills, said his plan addresses that concern by guaranteeing school districts at least current funding levels plus annual increases equal to the inflation rate.

The system would build a small reserve, he said, that can be used if times get tough.

And if that reserve is empty, the state would be responsible to pull money out of the general fund to make sure funding levels don't drop.

"It will come from somewhere, the General Assembly would have to fill it," Baldinger said.

Steve Robinson, spokesman for the Pennsylvania School Board Association, said a promise of no less than flat funding simply doesn't cut it.

For one thing, he said, there's no guarantee that the state wouldn't simply fill the gap by cutting basic education funding, the chief current path of state money to school districts. And even if the state found a way to make up the difference without cutting basic education money, status quo revenues would hurt schools, he said.

"How many years could that go on?" he said, saying expenses like the ones Grove pointed out won't vanish simply because revenue is stagnant. "Flat funding would not allow districts to keep up with rising costs."

Like Grove, Robinson said the strength of property taxes are their reliability.

Both Grove and Robinson also shared concerns about what happens when a school district needs to undertake a big project, like building or renovating a school.

Proposals have included an answer for this, allowing districts to put a request for extra funding for a specific project up for referendum vote.

"What if my constituents say no?" Grove said.

Robinson said that the state already has a referendum system for school property taxes. Districts are limited to how much they can raise taxes each year, and an increase over that limit has to be approved by referendum.

Since that measure was put in place about a decade ago, only about 20 districts have actually held a referendum, Robinson said. Only one passed.

Baldinger said he has faith that local communities will approve referendums, if they're indeed necessary for the benefit of students.

"I think people understand they need to do what they need to do for the schools," he said, saying referendums give the community a voice in school district issues.

Decisions on finances shouldn't take a referendum, Robinson countered, saying the local community already has control on how schools spend.

"They elect nine members of the community to discuss it in detail," he said, referring to local school boards and saying the community has the power to vote out members if they so choose.

Baldinger said electing a school board that will be consistently responsive to the financial concerns of the community is too heavy a lift.

"It's not going to happen, ever," he said.

Questions of equity

Inequity is another issue school officials bring up when discussing property tax elimination.

Pennsylvania is consistently ranked one of the worst states in the nation when it comes to gaps in per-student spending between rich and poor districts.

The state has attempted to address the problem, enacting a funding formula that takes into account things like the poverty level when giving out cash. That formula is currently being used to distribute annual increases in basic education funding.

Grove said switching away from property taxes would set those inequities in stone, as funding from earned income and sales taxes would be based on current property tax levies.

"What will happen is they will hard-wire the inequity into the system," he said.

Baldinger sees things differently. He said the switch would indeed freeze the current inequity level, but he argued that would actually work to close the gap.

The space between rich and poor districts is being caused by local revenues, Baldinger said, with wealthy districts raising more and more each year through property taxes. His plan would put all districts on equal footing, and allow new money coming through the state's new funding formula to shrink the divide.

And, Baldinger added, schools have other options besides the property tax to raise local revenue. He said there are 10 taxes - including a per capita tax, personal income tax, real estate transfer tax and others - they can levy if they need more money.

But, according to Robinson, those taxes do little to make up the difference from the loss of property tax. And several either require a referendum vote or are no longer allowed, with only districts that already had them in place able to use them.

Other fallout

On top of the potential impact for schools, both Robinson and Grove said they have concerns about what a tax shift could mean for the people of Pennsylvania.

Robinson said it would mean losing out on \$2.7 billion in property taxes paid by businesses, which would have to be made up by individuals.

Keever agreed: "We feel business needs to carry its share."

And it wouldn't even completely rid the state of property taxes, with the counties and municipalities still able to levy their own.

Most school districts, too, would continue to have property taxes, at least for a while. The elimination plan allows districts to keep a portion of the tax to cover existing debt, which would mean most districts would still have a property tax for several years, Robinson said.

For a district like Reading, that portion could be as high as 92 percent, according to a report by the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials.

Baldinger acknowledged that some school property taxes would remain, but for a short time. He said he questions the numbers in the association's report. The state Independent Fiscal Office estimated that on average, districts statewide would need to retain 18 percent of their property tax while paying off existing debt.

Grove called the tax shift, particularly the sales tax portion, insidious because people pay for it in very small pieces over time and likely won't realize how much it actually impacts them.

That means, he said, they could very well be one of the "losers" of the new system and not know it.

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http://lancasteronline.com/news/local/we-ain-t-giving-up-pa-senators-hold-forum-to/article_979a0928-8e8e-11e7-af9d-2f825f9f0748.html

'We ain't giving up': Pa. senators hold forum to discuss school property tax elimination

Sep 1, 2017

Three hundred and twenty-five years.

That's how long the debate over property taxes has been going on in Pennsylvania.

And, despite its latest efforts, the state Legislature doesn't appear close to agreeing on any substantial reform.

"Where things currently stand, we don't have enough votes," Republican Sen. Scott Martin said.

Martin, of Martic Township, was referring to Senate Bill 76, also known as the Property Tax Independence Act, which he and fellow Republican Sen. Ryan Aument of Landisville have co-sponsored.

The legislation would eliminate school property taxes and instead fund schools by increasing the state's income and sales taxes.

But while that's an alluring proposal for many homeowners — particularly those on fixed incomes — it's a potentially dangerous plan for school districts, say some educators, who argue that shifting billions of dollars of revenue to the state is too risky.

Martin and Aument — along with the bill's prime sponsor, Sen. David Argall, and other members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee — discussed the concerns Wednesday during a forum at Pequea Valley High School.

"This is an issue of great interest throughout Lancaster County," Aument said. "There is no issue that comes close to (property taxes) in terms of contacts from constituents."

Nearly all Lancaster County school districts will raise taxes in 2017-18; how much will tax bills increase?

Unless you live in Manheim Central, you'll be paying more in school property taxes this coming year.

It's also an issue that has given homeowners headaches since at least 1692 — 11 years after William Penn founded the Pennsylvania colony — when several hundred landowners signed a petition in opposition to the property tax.

That's why Argall and others teamed up with a grassroots group called the Pennsylvania Coalition of Taxpayer Associations to craft SB76.

"No tax should ever have the power to leave you homeless," said Ron Boltz, of the Pennsylvania Liberty Alliance, one of the dozens of taxpayer organizations in the Commonwealth lobbying for property tax reform.

School property taxes, he said, increased 146 percent from 1993 to 2013, and it's usually homeowners on the lower end of the economic ladder who fair the worst.

Argall's bill, Boltz said, "eliminates winners and losers" by nixing the school property tax.

To make up for the \$12 billion hole that would be left in the school property tax's wake, the bill calls for an increase in the state personal income tax of nearly 2 percentage points — from 3.07 percent to 4.95 percent — and a sales tax increase from 6 percent to 7 percent.

That money would go into a fund from which dollars would be distributed to school districts across the Commonwealth.

The transition would take two years.

New legislation would make it harder for school boards to increase property taxes

Critics of the bill say that requiring a two-thirds vote for tax increases would place an unnecessary burden on school board members, who have a difficult job as it is.

While agreeing that the reliance on school property taxes must be addressed, Solanco business manager Tim Shrom warned supporters of the bill that once it's done, there's no turning back.

"It cannot be undone. There is no safety net. You're going to be walking on a wire," he said. "While homeowners may love it ... what happens to the students, to the individual communities, to the school districts who cannot fund themselves?"

Hempfield chief operating officer Daniel Forry said he was "confused and amazed" while attempting to figure out how school funding wouldn't be in jeopardy. Filling the state's coffers with more money, as opposed to leaving taxing decisions up to local school boards, could put school districts in a greater financial bind, he said.

"School districts have very limited control," Forry said. "We need to restore more local control, not eliminate it completely."

After nearly two-and-a-half hours of discussion in front of a packed crowd at Pequea Valley, Aument said the group hasn't "lost sight of providing a high-quality education to our kids."

The legislation, which was narrowly defeated in the Senate in 2015, would need 26 votes in the Senate and 102 votes in the House. It first must pass through the Senate's finance committee, where it's been sitting since June.

Argall and others, however, said they remain optimistic a deal will get done.

"We ain't giving up," Argall said.

<http://www.ydr.com/story/news/2017/08/07/school-property-tax-elimination-doesnt-mean-its-over/528496001/>

School property tax elimination doesn't mean it's over

[Rick Lee](#), rlee@ydr.com Published 8:00 a.m. ET Aug. 7, 2017 | Updated 3:05 p.m. ET Aug. 14, 2017

School districts will still collect property tax to pay off outstanding debt and that will take years

With the elimination of property taxes, personal income and sales taxes will increase.(Photo: Stock)

A lot of disgruntled taxpayers may be smiling now over the prospect that their school property taxes could be eliminated.

But, they shouldn't get too excited. Even if a planned voter referendum passes this fall and the Pennsylvania Legislature does away with school taxes, it doesn't mean property owners would stop paying all school taxes immediately.

And a pending Pennsylvania Senate bill -- The Property Tax Independence Act -- calls for increasing personal income and sales taxes as replacement revenue for school districts.

It would allow the districts to continue to levy property taxes for a time -- years in most cases -- toward paying off outstanding debt.

All 15 school districts that are entirely within York County borders carry millions in long-term debt, generally the consequences of loans and bonds for capital improvements. West York's \$88.7 million debt, for example, is not expected to be paid in full -- principal and interest -- until 2033.

School taxes have been the bane of many property owners for decades. It was 20 years ago when a constitutional amendment limited the imposition of school property taxes to 50 percent of the median value of homes in the district.

In the years since, there have been interminable arguments, debates and unsuccessful legislative attempts to further limit or eliminate school property taxes. The referendum question is the result of the proposed constitutional amendment being passed twice in the general assembly in 2016 and 2017.

The November general election referendum will ask voters if the Pennsylvania General Assembly should be given the authority to amend the state Constitution to entirely exclude the taxation of residential properties.

Should the tax independence act become law, districts would still be allowed to collect lesser percentages of property taxes to put toward the pre-existing debt payments.

Those percentages vary widely, according to the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, from 11.96 percent in Dallastown Area School District to 47.58 percent in the York City School District. That means, Dallastown taxpayers would see an 88 percent drop in their property taxes, and city homeowners would see a 52 percent drop.

Tossing out those high and low examples, the average property tax rate for York county schools to pay off outstanding debts would drop to 15.46 percent, or almost an 85 percent reduction of current property taxes.

Some examples of York county districts' debt and when it is expected to be paid off are:

Spring Grove Area School District, \$88.7 million debt, to be paid off by 2028-29;

South Eastern School District, \$34.87 million debt, to be paid off in 2028-29;

Eastern York School District, \$42.52 million, to be paid off by 2027;

York Suburban School District, \$46.05 million, to be paid off by 2029.

Property tax elimination proposals before the Pennsylvania Legislature call for raising the personal income tax from 3.07 percent to 4.34 percent and the sales tax from .06 percent to .07 percent.

The higher sales tax also would be imposed on a number of goods and services that currently are untaxed, including: food; clothing and shoes over \$50; non-prescription medications; funeral expenses; diapers; child care services; trash collection; public transportation; newspapers and magazines; flags; horses; textbooks; candy; gum; and telecommunications (cellphone plans).

Money collected from those increased tax rates would not go directly to the school district. Instead, it would be collected by the state, which then would distribute it to the districts through the Education Stabilization Fund.

The elimination of property taxes does not include or change property taxes levied by municipalities or the county.

Reasons it will work

From a variety of sources, including the Pennsylvania General Assembly and grassroots taxpayers groups, here are five reasons why supporters of property tax elimination say it will work:

- 1.) Funds distributed by the commonwealth would be at a one-for-one rate for each district, meaning no district will see a reduction in funding.
- 2.) Taxpayers who see a reduction in property taxes would see increases in their disposable income. The reduction offsets the higher sales tax.
- 3.) Inability to pay school property taxes will not result in home foreclosures.
- 4.) The state will assume responsibility for school funding regardless of district taxpayers' ability to pay. Proponents say that will bring financial equity to school districts.
- 5.) Elimination of the property tax removes financial pressure on seniors and retirees living on fixed incomes.

Reasons it won't work

Opponents of the switch from property tax to personal income and sales taxes for school funding -- largely people and groups with ties to education -- predict a myriad of problems just as dire as ever-increasing property taxes.

- 1.) With the state collecting and distributing funding, there will be disparity in the distribution. School districts in Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties have the highest property taxes, and in the one-to-one replacement funding promise, these districts will receive the lion's share of the funding. Local tax dollars from increased income and sales taxes will not go to local school districts.
- 2.) Taxpayers in districts with high debt will see the money they pay for taxes rise as they continue to pay a percentage of property tax to pay off school debt and also pay the increased personal income and sales taxes.
- 3.) School districts that need to expand or encounter unexpected expenses will have no ability to generate revenue through property taxes.
- 4.) Personal income and purchases of taxable items rely on the health of the economy. An economic downturn or depression could significantly affect the amount of money available for distribution to schools.

5.) The personal income tax rate is increased from 3.07 percent to 4.34 percent and the sales tax is increased to 7 percent, creating a financial hardship on the middle class.

The public notice issued recently by the Secretary of the Commonwealth announcing the proposed constitutional amendment on property taxes does not address the increase in sales and personal income taxes.

The half-page notice, in fact, makes no mention of what would replace property taxes as the primary source of school funding.

It does, however, include the referendum question as it will appear on the November ballot throughout the Commonwealth.

The question reads: "Shall the Pennsylvania Constitution be amended to permit the General Assembly to enact legislation authorizing local taxing authorities to exclude from taxation up to 100 percent of the assessed value of each homestead property within a local taxing jurisdiction, rather than limit the exclusion to one-half of the median assessed value of all homestead property, which is the existing law?"

If a majority of voters can negotiate their way through the question and approve it, the constitution will be amended to prohibit school property taxes.

<http://www.ldnews.com/story/opinion/columnists/2017/03/16/local-tax-reform-would-eliminate-property-tax/99256134/>

Local tax reform would eliminate property tax

by Sen. Mike Folmer, guest columnist Published 1:12 p.m. ET March 16, 2017

my travels throughout the 48th Senatorial District, I hear a persistent drumbeat: “eliminate school property taxes” – not partial elimination or reduced school property taxes – total elimination.

That’s why I’ve joined with Senator Argall to fight for Senate Bill 76 to eliminate school property taxes. In 2015, the Senate fell one vote short: 24-25.

This isn’t the first time we’ve been down this road. Other plans have been offered to reduce property taxes and some have become law. However, none have totally eliminated school property taxes as proposed by SB 76.

Act 511 was passed in 1965 to reduce both school and municipal property taxes through a myriad of other taxes, which proved to be equally unpopular and were changed or repealed over the years while school property taxes continued to rise.

In 1987, Governor Casey and the General Assembly sent a bipartisan tax mixture to the voters that was overwhelmingly rejected by the voters statewide by a margin of over four-to-one.

During the Rendell Administration, gaming was promised to reduce property taxes by a minimum of 20 percent. Today, we have both gambling and school property taxes.

Every plan to eliminate school property taxes faces the same challenge: finding nearly \$14 Billion in replacement revenues. It’s a big number – nearly half the total state budget. But it’s the amount needed to eliminate school property taxes. And, there are just four basic options to raise \$14 Billion in replacement revenues: Personal Income Tax (PIT), Earned Income Tax (EIT), Sales & Use Tax, and/or some other, new tax.

Under SB 76, the Sales Tax would be broadened and expanded to 7% and the Personal Income Tax would be increased from 3.07% to 4.95%. Not only does this totally eliminate school property taxes, it’s fair because people have some control over paying the Sales Tax – a consumption tax. For each \$1,000 you now pay in school property taxes, you would need to spend \$14,285.71 in newly taxable items before it would cost you more.

SB 76 also gives schools the ability to raise revenues through either a locally imposed Personal Income Tax or an Earned Income Tax – after voter approval.

SB 76 also succeeds where other plans have fallen short because more people pay Sales and Personal Income taxes than those paying property taxes. Plus, the Sales and PIT are paid over time while property taxes are often a big sum paid at one time.

Home ownership is a fundamental principle within the Declaration of Independence and the US and Pennsylvania Constitutions.

Article I, Section 1 of Pennsylvania’s Constitution, “Inherent Rights of Mankind,” states: “All men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and inalienable rights, among which are those of enjoying and Defending life and liberty, of acquiring, possessing and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness.”

I don’t think any tax should have the power to leave you homeless.

Senate Bill 76 changes the status quo by replacing existing school property taxes – dollar-for-dollar – with revenues from the expanded Sales and Personal Income taxes.

Opponents of SB 76 have raised two main objections: the numbers don’t work and it’s technically flawed. I’m proud to have worked with Senator Argall to address both of these issues – and correct them. SB 76 works. The numbers add up. It’s technically correct.

<https://whyy.org/articles/uncertainty-swirls-around-pa-property-tax-amendment/>

Uncertainty swirls around Pa. property tax amendment that will soon go before voters

By Avi Wolfman-Arent
October 25, 2017

On November 7, Pennsylvanians will vote on a proposed constitutional amendment that could lead to lower property taxes and radically remake how the commonwealth funds its schools.

Or the amendment could pass and change nothing.

It's an odd juxtaposition: the proposed amendment might have drastic consequences, but is so laden with what-ifs that even political insiders and policy wonks don't yet know what to make of it.

“We don't have a really strong position on this because we could see good things coming out of it and we could see bad things coming out of it,” said Marc Stier, director of the [Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center](#), a liberal-leaning think tank.

Big picture, the amendment would give legislators unprecedented leeway to reduce or eliminate property taxes. The amendment does not, however, compel legislators to do anything. State lawmakers would have to pass a new law — or set of laws — to take advantage of the possibilities opened up by the proposed amendment.

And it's unclear what those proposals would be.

Crucially, the amendment would allow lawmakers to make a distinction between residential and commercial properties.

Right now, school districts can reduce residential property taxes by 50 percent thanks to a [previous constitutional amendment](#) approved in 1997. If they went any further they'd violate the state's constitutionally inscribed “uniformity clause,” which requires all classes of income to be taxed at the same rate unless there's a specific exemption.

One of the things the legislature could do if the amendment passes is eliminate property taxes solely on residences and farms, not businesses. In that scenario, any lost dollars would have to be replaced by some other form of revenue, likely state income or sales taxes.

Tax elimination coming?

Some backers of the amendment laud this possibility. They see it as a promising move toward the total abolition of residential property taxes, which a growing fringe of activists and lawmakers have been [pushing](#) for years.

“This referendum question is a big step in that direction,” said State Senator David Argall (R-Schuylkill County), who sponsors legislation that would completely eliminate school property taxes and replace local revenue with a statewide sales-tax hike.

Argall’s bill fell a vote shy of passing the Senate in 2015. But because the amendment will allow any future bills to make distinctions between residential and commercial property taxes, Argall believes former skeptics can be converted.

“If we tried to eliminate property taxes today, under the terms of the constitution, we’d have to do it for everyone,” he said. “What we’re trying to focus on are the people most in jeopardy of losing their homes to escalating property taxes.”

Local property taxes provide about \$12.6 billion annually to Pennsylvania schools — about 41 percent of the total spent on K-12 education, according to a previous Keystone Crossroads analysis.

Argall and other anti-property-tax advocates argue the reliance on this levy harms homeowners, especially seniors whose stagnant incomes often cannot match rising tax rates.

“The school property tax is unfair,” said Argall. “It’s based on my ability to buy a house 10, 20, 30, 50 years ago. It’s just not a good way to fund the public schools.”

Across the commonwealth, many school districts have felt pressure to continually hike local property taxes. Pension and healthcare costs have been rapidly rising, and the state’s school funding scheme, rooted in [“hold harmless” logic](#), has burdened some districts where enrollment has grown. As a result, many homeowners feel squeezed.

“It’s clearly wrongheaded”

But, from the perspective of schools, there are crucial advantages to the property tax. For one, it’s a more reliable source of revenue than something like a sales tax, which can fluctuate suddenly amid economic changes. It also allows greater local autonomy in school funding without leaving districts at the mercy of state decision makers.

If the passage of the amendment does indeed open the door to Argall’s plan, critics also lament its effect on school funding equity. Argall’s proposal would lock current local school funding levels into place, which would effectively mean that some of the state’s wealthiest school districts would become subsidized by statewide taxes paid by the lesser off.

Meanwhile, even with the bulk of school funding moving through Harrisburg under that scenario, poorer districts would continue to struggle under a system which does not match resources with need.

“It’s clearly wrongheaded,” said Donna Cooper, executive director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth and an [opponent](#) of the proposed amendment. “We should be looking to reduce property taxes for those who are most stressed and increase the state share of funding for our schools so that we decrease the pressure on homeowners.”

Cooper says the state could work within the existing framework to reduce the property tax burden on vulnerable homeowners. She pointed specifically to the [property tax rebate program](#), which reimburses older, low-income Pennsylvanians. Cooper would rather expand that initiative than pass an amendment that could strengthen the logistical and political position of anti-tax reformers.

“I see this as part of the long march that the property tax abolition community has been attempting to move forward for the last 15 years,” she said.

Stier, of PBPC, called Argall’s plan “the craziest piece of legislation I’ve heard of in 10 years of political activism and 25 years of teaching political science.”

But he does see potential positives in the proposed amendment that will soon go before voters. He believes the flexibility created through an exemption to the uniformity clause could allow Pennsylvania to offer more targeted help to those hemmed in by rising property tax rates.

“It might actually help some progressive legislation pass that would give directed property tax relief to people in the parts of the state where property taxes really do take too much of their income,” he said.

Stier envisions, for instance, legislation that would lower tax rates for poor and middle-income residents who spend a high proportion of their income on property taxes.

Long-term proposition

Jay Himes, head of The [Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials](#) (PASBO), supports the amendment because it could provide the flexibility to craft novel tax-relief solutions. Even though Himes, like Stier, does not advocate total property tax abolition, he believes the amendment “gives us an opportunity to target some relief to reduce the over-reliance we have on the property tax.”

“We fall in between the status quo and the so-called elimination end of the spectrum,” he said.

About the only thing all parties agree on is that the amendment is likely to pass and that its passage won’t force any immediate changes.

“You won’t see anything in the short term,” Himes said. “This is not a ‘now things are gonna change tomorrow’ proposition.”