



Governor presents plan to correct property-tax system flaw

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Gov. Rauner calls for legislation prohibiting state lawmakers from profiting from property-tax appeals; vows executive order

COUNTRY CLUB HILLS - Gov. Bruce Rauner listened at a south suburban roundtable today as people talked of struggling to hold on to their homes and businesses while paying some of the highest property taxes in the nation, and he vowed systemic change.

Lawmakers who gain income from the status quo have little incentive to tackle meaningful property-tax reform, Rauner said. So, he is calling for legislators to make it illegal for state lawmakers to also act as property-tax appeals lawyers, profiting from a property-tax assessment system that many have decried as fundamentally unfair. Legislation will be introduced when the General Assembly returns later this month.

Speaking at the Country Club Hills City Hall, Rauner also vowed to issue an executive order, which would be effective immediately, directing members of the Illinois Property Tax Appeals Board to prohibit state legislators from participating in appeals coming before them.

“The system is rigged so that only those with clout have the resources to fight it,” Rauner said. “Property taxes are through the roof here. It’s unfair, it’s unjust. It’s forcing people to move, forcing small businesses to leave ... We’ve got to change the system.”

Rauner noted his administration has worked with legislators to introduce and support property tax reform every year since his 2015 inauguration. That fight will continue — in combination with providing tools to allow local governments to control costs, he said. First up is stopping the practice of lawmakers profiting from the business of property-tax appeals, removing potential economic incentive to keep the process as is.

“It’s a clear conflict of interest,” the governor said, “and we need to end it.”

Legislators already are restricted from professionally representing individuals before the Workers’ Compensation Commission and the Court of Claims. This proposal simply adds the Property Tax Appeals Board and local government bodies to the list.

People frequently cite property taxes as a top reason for leaving the state. Illinois’ population declined by an estimated 33,700 in 2017, dropping from the fifth-largest to the sixth-largest state.

Several business and homeowners who attended today’s roundtable spoke of inequities and financial duress they have faced.

Glenwood homeowner Adam Winston said he bought his home 10 years ago for \$170,000. Today, he said, it is worth \$120,000, and his annual property tax bill totals \$8,000. Charles Higgins of Dolton pays \$4,800 in property taxes on his home valued at \$48,000, he said. Three homes on his block are abandoned; former neighbors have said they are walking away from their homes and mortgages because the property taxes have rendered them unaffordable.

Christine Wilson of Flossmoor bought her home in 2011 for \$257,000. It is now worth \$190,000, she said, according to a recent appraisal Wilson requested. The Cook County Assessor’s Office, however, says it is worth between \$290,000 and \$300,000, and her property taxes are \$12,698.

“We have the third-highest property tax burden in the U.S., and more mortgages under water due to crushing taxes than in 48 other states,” Rauner said. “Illinois has too many terrific assets — a tremendous workforce, world-class educational institutions and an unparalleled transportation hub, to name a few — to allow high taxes to continue to drain our economy.

“It’s time to change this story,” Rauner said. “A big key to that is restoring public trust and taking politics out of the equation.”