Bennett among those disappointed in property tax outcome

By Rep. TOM BENNETT
R-106th District

Six months ago, I was appointed to a new Property Tax Relief Task Force to study the state’s property tax system and look for ways to provide relief to Illinois taxpayers. Illinois property tax reforms are the second highest in the nation. The full task force met three times, and members brought forward proposals which were further studied by subcommittees. We were given a December 31 deadline to finish our work and report our recommendations.

Unfortunately, most of the dozens of suggested reforms from the Republican members of the task force were left out of the draft of the task force report, including proposals to reduce the property tax burden on senior citizen homeowners and the burden of state mandates. Meanwhile, recommendations and proposals which were never discussed by the full task force were included in the draft report. The task force failed to meet its October 31 deadline for an initial report, and a draft of the final report was only circulated to members late on December 23, with little opportunity for input or transparency.

The final product did not address the core issues impacting our broken property tax system and it was improperly presented by a few members of the task force without the kind of process and public consideration which an issue of this magnitude deserves. Accordingly, the House Republican members of the task force refused to approve the report, telling the task force’s leaders that, “meaningful, substantive property tax relief for beleaguered Illinois homeowners is critical, and the issue deserves serious and meaningful deliberation and reform ideas.”

In the past we have seen issues which the General Assembly’s leadership does not wish to address get shunted aside into task forces and “blue ribbon commissions,” which then predictably fail to produce any kind of solution to the problem they were charged with studying. I am sorry to report that it appears this is what has happened with the property tax relief task force. No reform, no relief. We need to do better on this issue in the new year.

Pension consolidation signed into law

Just before Christmas, Governor Pritzker signed Senate Bill 1300, which consolidates more than 600 downstate police and fire pension funds. This action was long overdue and will reduce the cost of managing these funds and increase the investment returns they can expect. The bill was part of long hours of negotiations and the compromise which emerged passed both houses by wide, bipartisan margins.

The legislation is expected to produce anywhere from $820 million to $2.5 billion in additional investment returns over the next five years. This means lower contributions from property tax payers. It also shows that we can find ways to come together on the important issue of pension reform, and that we can find a solution without raising taxes or cutting benefits. Pension reform will continue to be an important issue on our agenda in 2020.

How much do we owe?

As of the time of this writing, the State of Illinois owes $6,741,126,803 in unpaid bills to state vendors. See OUTCOME on other side.
Letters to the Editor

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If we have left anyone out, it is unintentional. We have had so many wonderful donors, volunteers and supporters over the years and are constantly amazed by our community.

Thank you all,
Russ Leigh
Co-Chair of Light up McFerren Park

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