

# Commentary

## Amendment 1: Workers' rights come with an unfair property tax hike

By AUSTIN BERG  
Illinois Policy Institute

What's a surefire way to guarantee an unfair property tax hike on Illinois homeowners? Make Amendment 1 the law of the land.

Not a great prospect for a state that's losing population because taxes are already high.

If voters Nov. 8 approve Amendment 1, also known as the "Workers' Rights Amendment," it would guarantee a \$2,100 property tax hike for the typical Illinois homeowner.

Let's dig into that more.

Pros or just cons? Apart from elected leaders, our ballot this year also contains Amendment 1. The proposed amendment to the Illinois Constitution would prevent commonsense reforms to reduce homeowners' tax burdens while giving government union leaders virtually limitless new ways to demand higher costs from taxpayers. If it passes, Illinois' trend of large annual property tax increases will likely grow faster than ever. Gov. J.B. Pritzker has failed to deliver on his promise of property tax relief during his term – the average family paid \$1,913 more during his administration.

Amendment 1 would grant government unions unprecedented bargaining powers as a "fundamental right," includ-

ing the power to override voters and state lawmakers. No other state gives unions that kind of power embedded in its constitution. Proponents are selling it as a constitutional ban on passing right-to-work laws – laws that protect employees' rights to keep their jobs without having to pay fees to a union. Illinois is not among the 28 states that currently have right-to-work laws, so that aspect has little meaning.

Amendment 1 and corruption. It's also worth noting an Amendment 1 sponsor – former state Sen. Thomas Cullerton – was just sentenced to a year in prison for a union ghost payroll scheme.

Cullerton will still collect a \$2 million pension even after spending time in federal prison for embezzlement. He's one of eight former General Assembly members to face federal charges in the past three years.

Is this normal? Some voters may be tempted to give lawmakers the benefit of the doubt; surely these tax hikes are in line with what other states are doing, right? Nope. Some states are seeing declines, and of those that have seen increases, only one state has raised taxes more than Illinois has.

Give me the deets. The fine print of Amendment 1 is what should give voters the most pause. The amendment language includes three provi-

### Amendment 1 guarantees \$2,149 property tax hike for typical Illinois family

Increase in projected average property tax bill relative to 2022

Year	Increase
2023	\$207
2024	\$422
2025	\$645
2026	\$876
<b>4-year total</b>	<b>\$2,149</b>

Uses compound annual growth rates in home prices as reported by the All-Transactions House Price Index for Illinois from 2010-2021 to project future average home values through 2026. Uses compounded annual growth rate in average property taxes as calculated by U.S. Census Bureau for 2010-2019 to project property taxes through 2025.

Table: @illinoispolicy • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency • Created with Datawrapper

sions which would weaken taxpayers' voices in state government and make it easier for government union leaders to make unaffordable demands in collective bargaining agreements.

Research indicates property taxes could rise higher and faster than even estimated, but by how much remains uncertain. That's because Amendment 1 would lead to unprecedented government union bargaining powers that don't exist in any other state and is so

far-reaching that it is hard to predict all the new demands on taxpayers.

When union power increases, homeowners' tax bills tend to go up as well. The only real question is: How much?

Austin Berg is the vice president of marketing at the Illinois Policy Institute.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This op-ed was distributed by The Policy Shop at Illinois Policy Institute. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.*

## Better politics, smarter government: A gold mine for Illinois political junkies

By JOHN T. SHAW

I recently went looking for a nugget and found a gold mine.

Let me explain. I visited the website of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum a few weeks ago to track down information on a former Illinois lawmaker from its oral history collection. I emerged several hours



Shaw

later delighted, stimulated, and eager for a return trip.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum is a remarkable institution, serving as a kind of mecca for those interested in our 16th president. It offers unmatched resources about Lincoln but also has plenty of other materials about Illinois politics and government. Among other things, the library has a remarkable oral history collection, which it says is "dedicated to preserving the stories and memories of Illinois's citizens, not just the famous and prominent among us."

The library has conducted more than 1,000 interviews for its oral history project, including conversation with veterans, farmers, civil rights activists, athletes and politicians. It has more than 200 interviews about Illinois government and politics. Major topics include the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment, the state's pension crisis, Barack Obama's years in Illinois, Ronald Reagan's youth in Dixon, reflections of legislators and journalists, and the administrations of Dan Walker, Jim Thompson, Jim Edgar and Pat Quinn.

During my foray into the oral

history collection, I came across some gems. For example:

Abner Mikva's early impressions of Barack Obama

Mikva served in both the Illinois and U.S. House of Representatives and as a federal judge and White House legal counsel. Mikva recalls trying as a federal judge to hire Barack Obama as a law clerk. Obama had other plans, but the two men later became colleagues and friends at the University of Chicago Law School. Mikva says Obama was a "fabulous teacher" and "an incredibly effective state senator." Mikva says that Obama ran a "miserable" campaign for the U.S. House in 2000 and pondered leaving politics. However, Obama persisted and launched a longshot bid to win the U.S. Senate seat in 2004. Obama ran a strong campaign and had good luck when two formidable contenders dropped out of the race because of personal scandals. Then Barack Obama gave an amazing speech in Boston at the Democratic National Convention — and the rest is history.

Dawn Clark Netsch's ideal for political campaigns

Netsch was a law professor, state senator, comptroller and the Democratic nominee for governor in 1994. In her interview, Netsch describes political campaigns as an "opportunity to educate" the public on important issues. She believes candidates should explain complex issues, identify a range of solutions and endorse a policy. This view of campaigns has largely disappeared, especially with the arrival of 30-second attack ads. But Netsch argues that this approach respects voters and strengthens our democracy.

Christine Radogno's attempt to end a protracted budget stalemate

Radogno was a Republican state senator from 1997 to 2017 and the Senate GOP leader from 2009 to 2017. In her

interview, she describes the frustration of working with a governor of her own party, Bruce Rauner, who was a "disruptor" rather than a deal maker. "He made himself irrelevant by not compromising," she says. Radogno vividly describes her effort to assemble a Grand Bargain with Senate Democratic Leader John Cullerton to end the protracted budget stalemate of 2015-2017. Radogno's effort failed, and she resigned from the Senate. But she said the serious bipartisan negotiations were "such a pleasant experience. This is how it should be."

Mike Lawrence drafts three speeches for Governor Edgar

Lawrence was a veteran journalist, press secretary and the second director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute. Lawrence left the Edgar administration in the summer of 1997 to come to the Institute but continued to informally advise the governor. That summer, Edgar agonized over three options for his future: run for a third term as governor in 1998, seek a U.S. Senate seat or retire from politics. To help Edgar

decide, Lawrence wrote a draft speech for each of the alternatives. As Edgar read the speech announcing his retirement, he grew emotional. He later told Lawrence that he knew "intellectually" this was the right decision, but that it was very hard to leave a job he loved.

As I listened to these interviews, I was struck by the clear voices, compelling personalities, and wonderful stories that emerged. This oral history collection really brings Illinois history to life. Audio from every interview is available online at [OralHistory.Illinois.gov](http://OralHistory.Illinois.gov)

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: This op-ed was distributed by Capitol News Illinois on behalf of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.*

### Letter to the Editor

(Regarding the July Illinois Business Journal Opinion Page columns). A delight and kudos to read such "factual opinion," so nicely contradictory, against the slew of fake news we encounter every day.

If only these facts were published more broadly. And, I am copying these articles for those I, luckily only occasionally, meet who would benefit from such good journalism. Of course, it may be a forlorn hope but we have to try, to counteract forgotten recent history, and the original commendable intentions of the NRA. Have we got too

far away from those events? Thanks.

I'm a recovering Brit, with similar concerns about my homeland, who celebrated 10 years of citizenship here on the 13th. Some ask why, and my response is generally we are democracy in progress, and as I believe Churchill said, "You don't want to see or hear how the sausage is made," at least akin to that,

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