

Senate bill would hold down property tax increases that fund schools

By Mark Nease
Capitol Beat News Service

Tax increases on Georgia homeowners could be limited to the inflation rate — including taxes for education after most school systems decided against capping property tax hikes last year.

The state Senate's Republican majority introduced a bill this week that would require all school systems to limit property tax increases that occur because of rising home values.

About 71% of Georgia's 180 school systems voted last year to reject

the cap, as allowed by state law. This year's bill would change that law and prevent school systems from opting out of the cap.

If approved, the legislation would save homeowners money — and reduce funding for public education in some areas. School systems would lose the ability to tax property on values that rose higher than the inflation rate in the previous year.

"The majority of people in Georgia aren't seeing the relief that was promised because they're continuing to see double-digit tax increases," said state Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, R-

Rome, the lead sponsor of Senate Bill 382. "People have seen huge property tax increases, and we need to limit it to the rate of inflation. We all need to live within our means."

While no one likes paying higher taxes, schools would pay the price, said John Zauner, executive director of the Georgia School Superintendents Association.

Education expenses would continue to rise with inflation, but school systems would receive less money from property taxes.

"I'm sympathetic. I pay taxes and they're always

going up," Zauner said. "But that's the only choice local districts have. They don't have any other options."

Under a state law and constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2024, home property assessments are capped at the inflation rate for the previous year. By holding down increases in property values, property tax hikes are also limited because they're based on the assessed value of a home and the property tax rate.

Besides school systems, the proposed bill would also affect city and county governments that

also opted out of the tax cap. About 29% of city and county governments voted against capping their property tax values last year, according to records from the secretary of state's office.

Lt. Gov. Burt Jones said the property tax bill is a priority for this year's legislative session.

"As part of our ongoing efforts to keep costs low and put more money back in Georgians' pockets, this legislation will limit increases in home values for property taxes year to year and require more accountability and transparency in our local taxation pro-

cedures," Jones said.

The property tax limit is one of several tax proposals being debated at the Capitol.

Senate Republicans also want to gradually eliminate income taxes, while House Speaker Jon Burns, R-Newington, suggested he favors ending homestead property taxes.

Gov. Brian Kemp said in his State of the State Address on Thursday he wants to give tax rebates averaging \$250 per taxpayer, as well as reducing the state income tax rate by one-fifth of a percentage point, to 4.99%.

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"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." — Carl Rogers

Our Own Worst Enemies

There are a variety of ways in which we are our own worst enemies. Sometimes the harshness of our self-criticism is downright cruel. The funny thing about harsh self-criticism is that if it came from someone else we would consider them despicable and avoid them at all costs and yet we put up with it when it comes from ourselves. Why we accept such harsh self-criticism probably stems from a fair amount of self-hatred, or at least a low opinion of ourselves. Perhaps we feel the self-criticism is on target or that it is intended constructively. In either case, we could stand to be a bit easier on ourselves and show ourselves some grace. A related way in which we self-sabotage is by being overly self-conscious. Self-consciousness can be a good thing; no one wants to be around the narcissistic boor who has no clue how arrogant and obnoxious he is. So a modicum of self-awareness is necessary to keep our inner jerk at bay. But when we get to the point of overthinking everything we say or do we become paralyzed. Self-awareness is good; self-consciousness is usually not. In meditation we are taught to be aware of the thoughts occurring in our heads, but not to be critical of them. It's like sitting calmly on the bank of a river and watching the boats go by, but in this case, we're watching thoughts, ideas, or emotions go by. And that is why we call it the stream of consciousness, because it's always flowing and even the most adroit meditators will find random stuff flowing by. So pay attention to your attention, but not to the point of "paralysis by analysis," and be self-critical, but not to the point of being harsh or cruel. Show yourself some grace.
— Christopher Simon

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