

2/4/07

## OUR TURN

# Task force downplays remedy for appraisals

The governor's task force attacks local control while downplaying the significance of disclosure.

Having slashed local school property tax rates in a special legislative session last year, Gov. Rick Perry set his sights on what he considers to be the largest remaining problem with Texas property taxes — rising appraisal values.

To that end, Perry appointed a special task force on appraisal reform.

Last month, the task force issued its report. And while it is filled with recommendations — at least one of them even useful — it never defines what the fundamental problem is in the current appraisal system.

As evidence that something is wrong, the task force cites rising property tax revenues, from \$9 billion statewide in 1985 to more than \$30 billion in 2004. That 233 percent increase in property taxes compares with inflation growth of 76 percent during the same period. The implication is that appraisal districts have gone bonkers.

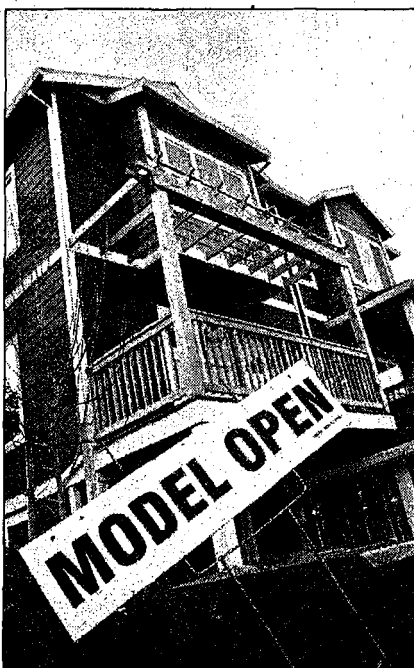
But property taxes are derived from two elements: appraised values and the rates taxing entities apply to them.

Even if the appraised value of Texas property accrued at a greater rate than inflation — an investment result Texas property owners should desire — that's not necessarily evidence the appraisal system is flawed. The stock of Southwest Airlines rose by about 1,300 percent during the same period, but that doesn't mean the stock market is flawed.

It's no surprise, then, that despite months of testimony and research, the task force has only one meaningful recommendation on the appraisal process itself, and it's a qualified recommendation at that.

The final report gives lukewarm endorsement to what should be the centerpiece of appraisal reform: full disclosure of all real estate transactions.

Texas is one of the few states that collects a property tax but doesn't require the disclosure of real estate sales prices. Fixing the



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

In most other states, the disclosure of real estate sales prices is mandatory. But not in Texas, and that's the problem.

distortions caused by the undervaluation of commercial and high-end residential property lies at the heart of an equitable and accurate system.

But what little the task force has to say about this basic issue is wrapped up in a series of legislative and constitutional proposals concerning tax revenues — most of them misguided. The key proposal would mandate rollback elections for local governments with tax revenue growth in excess of 5 percent.

At present, taxpayers can petition for a rollback election if revenues increase by more than 8 percent.

For fast-growing communities or small communities laboring under unfunded state mandates, the lower threshold for automatic rollback elections is a costly and unwarranted intrusion into local government.

The report calls for greater accountability. That's a good start, beginning with accountability in Austin for those unfunded mandates.

But it's a mystery how a task force that was supposed to address an appraisal problem ended up tip-toeing around its key issue while kicking the concept of local control to the curb.

— Angelo A. De Gennaro

## Edwards lacks sense

Anyone aspiring to be president of the United States should exhibit enough character to be appalled by any individuals on his staff who spew foul-mouthed indecency about the Catholic Church.

When John Edwards did not have sufficient common sense to immediately fire these ignorant bloggers, he clearly demonstrated he has no credentials to even think about running for the presidency.

— William Hart,  
Universal City

## Inspiration to youngsters

I must congratulate the Express-News on the excellent article Josh Baugh wrote describing the life of Ward White III ("Overcoming racial barriers," Neighbors, Feb. 14). What an inspiration Mr. White must be to all young people who know him or read about him.

San Antonio College is to be congratulated for choosing to honor Mr. White as the Outstanding Former Student this year. I am proud to have been a part of that fine institution for many years.

— June McManus

## Local governments hurt

On behalf of local government, we applaud the editorial "Task force downplays remedy for appraisals" (Feb. 4). We recognize Texans want property taxes reduced. School district taxes for many homeowners may be three to four times their county taxes primarily because our Legislature abdicated its responsibility for school funding for so many years. Therefore, school districts (and property owners) were forced to pick up the added tax burden.

Now our Legislature has finally accepted its financial responsibility for schools again — through a tax shift, i.e., the state picks up added costs but does so through revenue from added taxes on businesses, tobacco products, etc.

However, there is no shift in taxes being considered by the task force for local governments, only a tax gouge. The proposed formula for determining the "effective tax rate" for counties will be especially egregious for rapidly growing counties, such as Co-

mal. Not only is the tax cap proposed to be reduced from 8 percent to 5 percent with voter action automatic for an exceedance rather than via petition process, but counties will, in effect, be penalized for the extensive growth that we are experiencing.

Additionally, we are not confident that our legislators are serious about not continuing to dump unfunded mandates on us at the same time that our revenues are under challenge.

— Jay Millikin,

Comal County commissioner, Precinct 2,  
New Braunfels

## Support local theater

Regarding Edith Speert's letter "Performance was deafening" (Feb. 6) about the Majestic Theatre, it appears the theater management fails to read the letters section of the Express-News. This is about the fifth time the same complaint has been entered, including two of my own.

Actually, this has been a blessing as I now spend my time and money on local theater arts productions, which are many and varied.

Just read the Weekender section or go to the San Antonio Theatre Coalition Web site at [www.sattheatre.com](http://www.sattheatre.com). Click on "Now Playing" for a list of local and surrounding live theater productions. The fare is truly amazing. Everything from local professional artists to high school and college productions, many presented at beautifully renovated old movie houses like the Josephine and Woodlawn. I have yet to install ear plugs.

Please consider the fact that the Broadway productions are here for a

## GUIDELINES

Have something to say?

Then write us at Letters, Express-News, P.O. Box 2171, San Antonio, 78297, fax to (210) 250-3465, or e-mail to [letters@express-news.net](mailto:letters@express-news.net). All letters, including e-mail, should have full name (no initials or pseudonyms, please), address and daytime telephone number. Length? The shorter the better — long enough to make your point. Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.

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New letters will be posted today about noon.