

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

The bill implicates the following House Principle:

Ensure lower taxes— If authorized by the legislature, implemented by counties, and if market values continue to outpace the proposed assessment cap, the extension of the “Save Our Homes” limitation from homestead¹ to most real property, would reduce the growth in total assessed property values. As a result, the amount of ad valorem property taxes billed to property owners will be reduced, unless a county, municipality, or other local taxing authority adopted a corresponding increase in the millage rate to offset the likely reductions in the growth in total assessed values.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Ad valorem property taxes are the single largest source of tax revenues for general purpose local governments in Florida. In FY 2002-03, the last year for which fiscal information is available, property taxes accounted for 31 percent of county governmental revenue (\$6.3 billion), and almost 20 percent of municipal government revenue (\$2.4 billion). Ad valorem property tax revenues also are the primary local revenue source for school districts. For that same fiscal year, school districts levied \$8.4 billion in property taxes.

Ad valorem property tax revenues result from multiplying the millage rate adopted by counties, municipalities, and school boards by the taxable value of property within that jurisdiction. Each entity may levy up to 10 mills and, in most cases, the real property must be assessed at just value.² Article VII, s. 6 of the State Constitution authorizes a \$25,000 ad valorem property tax exemption for homestead property.

In 1992, Florida voters approved the so-called “Save Our Homes” amendment to the State Constitution. This amendment limits the annual growth in the assessed value of homestead property to 3 percent over the prior year’s assessment or the percentage change in the U. S. Consumer Price Index, whichever is less. It does not limit assessment increases for other types of property such as non-homestead residential, commercial, or industrial property. This has produced valuation differentials for tax purposes among properties having similar market values. The “Save Our Homes” exception is one of several exceptions to the just value requirement found in Article VII, s. 4 of the State Constitution.³

¹ That is, real property owned by a taxpayer and used as the owner's permanent residence or the permanent residence of another who is legally or naturally dependent upon the owner.

² “Just value” is the estimated market value of the property. “Assessed value” is generally synonymous with “just value” unless a constitutional exception such as Save Our Homes applies to reduce the value of the property. “Taxable value” is the assessed value minus any applicable exemptions such as the \$25,000 homestead exemption.

³ These include exceptions for agricultural land, land producing high water recharge to Florida's aquifers, and land used exclusively for non-commercial recreational purposes, all of which may be assessed solely on the basis of their character or use. Tangible personal property that is held as inventory may also be assessed at a specified percentage of its value or totally exempted. Additionally, counties and cities may be authorized to assess historical property based solely on the basis of its character or use, without regard to just value. The Legislature also has provided for differential treatment of specific property, to include pollution control devices and building renovations for the physically handicapped.

Largely due to the recent surge in housing values⁴ and lack of corresponding millage rate reductions by local officials to offset double-digit increases in taxable values, ad valorem property tax revenues have increased substantially in recent years: 9.2 percent in 2002, 11.5 percent in 2003, and 10.4 percent in 2004.⁵ These annual property tax increases are twice as high as the 5 percent average increase experienced between 1991 and 2000, but comparable to the 12.5 percent average annual increase from 1981 to 1990.⁶ Despite the growth in total taxable values, the statewide average actual millage rates have remained relatively unchanged, although on a generally downward trend.⁷ However, the differential between the actual millage rate and the so-called “rolled back rate” (i.e., the millage rate necessary to generate the same amount of revenue as the prior year excluding new construction and boundary changes) is substantially more pronounced since 2000, then it was from 1990 to 1999.

The taxable value of all real property has increased 53 percent over the past four years.

The amount of value removed from the tax rolls from the “Save Our Homes” provision is growing at a much faster rate than the amount of value removed by the homestead exemption. For example, in 2006, the amount of value excluded from the tax rolls as a result of the Save Our Homes provision was \$344.2 billion (or \$174.9 billion more than the previous year), compared to \$108.9 billion (or \$4.5 billion more than the previous year) removed as a result of the homestead exemption.

Proposed Change

This joint resolution proposes to amend Article VII, section 4 of the State Constitution. The amendment would allow the Legislature to authorize counties, by general law, to provide by ordinance for the extension of the Save Our Homes assessment limitation to all real property. However, the 3 percent maximum increase in assessed value for homestead property would be raised to a 5 percent maximum increase for non-homestead property. That is, the annual assessed value of real property included within this joint resolution could not be increased over the prior year’s assessment by more than 5 percent or the percentage change in the U. S. Consumer Price Index, whichever is less. The limitation would not apply to agricultural land, land producing high water recharge for Florida’s aquifers, land used exclusively for non commercial recreational purposes and historic property assessed on the basis of character or use. This authority would not extend to determinations of the value of real property taxed for school purposes

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Not applicable.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

⁴ The boom in housing values does not translate into an identical increase in “just values” or “assessed values” since not all property is taxed at “just value.” “Just values” have experienced double-digit increases since 2001: 10.6% in 2001; 11.3% in 2002; 12.4% in 2003; and 14.0% in 2004. For the period 1990-2000, the largest increase was 8.3%, with two years, 1992 and 1993, experiencing an increase of only 2.0%. Although not as large, the growth in “taxable values” resulted in a similar experience.

⁵ “Taxes Levied and Millage Rates 1974-2004,” from 2006 Property Tax Roll Estimates prepared by the Department of Revenue. The amount of ad valorem property tax levied for 2005 is not yet available, but the value of property subject to tax increased by approximately 20%.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Actual average millage rates for all jurisdictions for 2004—20.18; for 2003—20.60; for 2002—20.57. Excluding public school levies for 2004—11.96; for 2003—12.06; for 2002—11.93.

2. Expenditures:

Art. XI, s. 5, of the Florida Constitution, requires that each proposed amendment to the Constitution be published in a newspaper of general circulation in each county two times prior to the general election. The Division of Elections within the Department of State estimates that the cost of compliance for a proposal with a ballot summary of 75 words or less would be approximately \$50,000.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

If authorized by the Legislature, counties adopting the assessment limitation as provided in this joint resolution, as well as municipalities and other local taxing authorities, would be expected to experience a significant adverse fiscal impact, assuming no offsetting change in millage rates. This bill has a negative indeterminate impact to local revenues since the number of counties which would choose to implement it cannot be determined. If all counties fully implemented this bill and millage rates remained the same, the fifth year impact would be approximately a negative \$6.3 billion dollars in local revenues.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

The mandates provision does not apply to House Joint Resolutions.

2. Other:

Article XI, Section 1 of the State Constitution provides the Legislature with the authority to propose amendments to the State Constitution by joint resolution approved by three-fifths of the membership of each house. The amendment must be placed before the electorate at the next general election held after the proposal has been filed with the Secretary of State's office or may be placed at a special election held for that purpose.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

Not applicable.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES

On March 8, 2006 the House Judiciary committee adopted an amendment that effectively converts the original bill as filed into one requiring the Legislature to authorize, and county discretion to implement the assessment limitation. The Legislature would be authorized to permit counties to extend the Save Our Homes homestead property assessment limitation to certain other real property. Additionally, this authority would not extend to determinations of value of homestead property for school purposes. This analysis reflects the changes made by the amendment.

On April 11, 2006, the Committee on Finance and Tax Adopted one amendment to the bill which provides the maximum increase in the assessed value of non-homestead property shall be 5 percent as opposed to the 3 percent maximum increase in the assessed value of homesteaded property.