

Tax Cap Decision

Last week, the state Senate approved landmark legislation to limit soaring school taxes with a 4 percent cap on property tax levies.

You could call tax caps a Long Island movement. Tax caps were proposed by a state commission led by Nassau Executive Tom Suozzi, and embraced by Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos of Rockville Centre.

This controversial concept was also endorsed by Governor Paterson, who offered the tax cap legislation approved by the Senate. Next week, the Assembly should take up the issue.

Though polls show caps have wide popular support, many elected officials and educators oppose caps.

Under Governor Paterson's proposal, tax caps would limit annual increases in property tax levies to 4 percent or 120 percent the rate of inflation. That's unless 55 percent of the voters in a school district decided otherwise.

Tax caps promise a welcome change for taxpayers in Long Island school districts, many burdened with double-digit increases.

But the Nassau Suffolk School Boards Association opposes caps. In a report, the association says caps would deny school districts flexibility, and would most hurt districts that have little commercial property, but must rely on taxing residential property. The association says there are better alternatives.

Perhaps. But we believe tax caps will force the state to find them and fund them, bringing changes in state aid formulas that treat suburban districts unfairly.

A tax cap is a blunt instrument. But putting a lid on school property taxes is one way to stop Albany from passing the buck to local taxpayers.

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