

Shifting the debate to the desirability of continuing to use property taxes as the principal support for local governments is extraordinarily difficult. Fear of political retribution causes legislators to shy away from even discussing the issue openly.

Taking the path of least resistance has proved irresistible over the years, aided by entrenched special interests willing to accept periodic tweaks but vigorously opposing broader systemic revisions.

There has been, recently, some stirring of interest in re-examining the property tax structure and a growing sense that it is unfair, punitive and has driven the cost of living in New Jersey to unattainable heights.

Two legislators with differing political philosophies — Assemblyman Lou Greenwald (D-Camden) and Sen.

Opponents immediately argued his idea was unconstitutional and the courts would quickly find it so. Moreover, they contend, it would devastate urban districts whose costs of education are much greater, but local resources much narrower and would throw a crushing burden onto the backs of homeowners.

While the fate of the Greenwald and Doherty programs is uncertain at best, both deserve credit for recognizing the time has come for systemic changes in how governments are funded, and nudging the debate in a new direction.

It also moves closer to an understanding that spending reductions alone are insufficient to produce meaningful or lasting property tax reductions. The days of the \$25,000-a-year teacher and the \$30,000-a-year cop are over.

There has not been a rush of support from their colleagues for either legislator, but both have suggested the debate is overdue and certainly worth having. They're right.

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