



History of TRAC

The Tax Reform Action Coalition (TRAC) was born of outrage and frustration in the summer of 2000 when yet another triennial reassessment presented assessment increases of 50% or more. Homeowners and renters alike would once again have to make significant budget adjustments, and in the worst cases consider moving out of their communities, as property taxes increased beyond their ability to pay.

The Lake View Citizens Council (LVCC) acknowledging the enormity of the problem, held a large community meeting involving all of its 11 branches. While elected state and county officials attended this meeting it became clear that no one was offering any bold, long-term solutions to skyrocketing property taxes. They continued to coach people on how to appeal these assessment increases but did not address the issue of these increases. LVCC responded to this void of ideas by forming a committee to spearhead property tax reform in a strong and organized effort to protect the community of property owners and renters from escalating taxes. The Tax Reform Action Coalition (TRAC) was born!

During the next two years, TRAC became the conduit for the exchange of ideas among citizens and government on property tax reform. TRAC met with community groups and listened to their concerns and spearheaded the dialogue with our elected officials. Public forums were held with elected officials to educate both sides on the impact that rising property taxes were having on all the citizens.

In 2003, as the newest reassessment notices began to roll out across the neighborhoods, the cry for reform grew louder. TRAC met with Assessor James Houlihan and delivered the message "Repeal and Reform!" Repeal the 2003 assessment and reform the property tax system. Faced with assessment increases from 50 to 146% on properties in just one year, the people were calling for reform and FINALLY a small number of elected officials were beginning to listen.

TRAC organized the "Chicago Tea Party" in August of 2003. The tax revolt began. Supporters turned out in droves. Speakers at the event included Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, County Commissioners Claypool and Quigley and Aldermen Schuler and Flores. An impassioned speech by Fr. Dominic Grassi rallied the crowd and concluded with, "We will continue to let our voices be heard and votes counted. You politicians ain't heard or seen nothing yet. It doesn't matter what political party you belong to, we will support you if you take the moral high ground with us and be assured that we will vote you out of office if you do not. Know this: right will prevail. Good will win. Justice must be achieved. LET THE REFORM BEGIN!"

The citizens became energized. TRAC's coalition of communities grew. Activism took root. It spread throughout the cities neighborhoods. Real pressure was being applied. The result was that legislation was drafted and taken to Springfield by Assessor James Houlihan with Reps. Fritchey, Lang and Ostermann shepherding the bill through the House and Senate. Calls to action were sent out throughout the city and the citizens responded overwhelmingly. The campaign for "repeal and reform" was well on its way. Bus trips down to the state capitol in Springfield; letters, phone calls, and emails were sent; outdoor rallies at night in the middle of the winter were held; yard signs calling for reform appeared even in front of the Governor's house! The people were raising their voices in unison and the message was being delivered loud and clear. The Mayor, aldermen, county commissioners and our state Representatives and Senators worked hard to get the legislation passed. It was observed by some veteran politicians that this bill, SB2112, was passed in record time.

What was delivered to us was far short of what we needed. We hit a roadblock in the state legislature and the "leadership" changed the bill so that it became a band aide for short-term relief. It was signed by Governor Blagojevich in the summer of 2004 and did provide relief but it did not REFORM the system.

So we continue...

The sociologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

So TRAC continues to work on reforming the property tax system. We have developed a reform package with the assistance from the Center for Economic Policy Analysis (CEPA), including a legal opinion by attorneys Steven F. Pflaum and Nicholas M. Berg of McDermott, Will & Emery, a premier international law firm with a diversified business practice. Numbering more than 1100 lawyers, offices are located in Boston, Brussels, Chicago, Düsseldorf, London, Los Angeles, Miami, Munich, New York, Orange County, Rome, San Diego, Silicon Valley and Washington, D.C. The reform package also includes a legal opinion from Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI). It has been presented to Cook County Assessor James Houlihan. Meetings with our state, city and county elected representatives are taking place. TRAC is working to educate these groups on the urgent need to change the way we assess properties. We are continuing to add communities and organizations to our coalition from all over the county.

In 2006 the city faces another reassessment. The continuing strong real estate market will have another devastating impact on property taxes in Chicago and other areas around the state. The need for property reform is imperative.

Our Mission: The Tax Reform Action Coalition, founded in 2000, is a community based advocacy group whose mission is to reform the property tax system in Illinois, making it fair and predictable for all property owners.

Our Vision: The enactment of a property tax system that is fair and predictable, that will enable property owners to remain in their neighborhoods long term, and that will help preserve diversity in our communities.

Our Goals: To educate our communities and elected officials about the need for significant property tax reform. To encourage our elected representatives to enact legislation that improves the way properties are assessed. To promote stability and continued growth in our communities.

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