

# SF Chronicle Editorial is Wrong on Prop 13

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The San Francisco Chronicle wants to raise property taxes on homes. That has to be the conclusion from its [editorial](#) that criticizes Gov. Brown for saying he will not support a “split roll” taxing businesses differently than homes. The Chronicle calls this a “primary” reform. Clearly, the editorial writers have in mind a secondary reform: changing the property tax formula for homes.

The proof of the Chronicle’s position is the argument that Prop 13 “masquerades” as a homeowners’ friend; that poor sap voters “believe” the measure saves money and prevents jumps in taxes. Look for one shred of evidence to back up this foolish statement that Prop 13 has not been a tax saver for voters and you won’t find one.

Here’s the truth. If the property tax system reverted to what it was prior to Prop 13 passing, property would be taxed at full market value at 2.7%. Even if the property tax rate remained at 1% as prescribed by Prop 13, the increase in market values, especially in San Francisco, would send a shock to the system of property taxpayers. Yes, the people’s belief is correct—Prop 13 does save money and prevents jumps in taxation.

As to the fairness question raised by the editorial—that has been dismissed by both the California and United States Supreme Court. Property taxes are not a fee for service tax. Different properties have always paid varying amounts for the services they receive from local government. The Proposition 13 formula did not change that fact but it did for the first time give certainty to the taxpayer instead of the tax collector.

Proposition 13 not only protects taxpayers from runaway property taxes but also has made the property tax the most stable of all California revenue sources, increasing at a steady pace above inflation and population growth ever since it passed.

If the Chronicle wants to take out its ire it should do so against the public employee unions who convinced friendly legislators to kill a reform bill that would have reined in the few businesses that game the system to prevent property tax increases when the businesses are sold. The unions didn’t want that small fix; they wanted big property tax increases with a split roll—and if the Chronicle has its way, more property taxes from all kinds of property.

*A shorter version of this article was published in the San Francisco Chronicle.*

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