



WHAT EVERY LAWYER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES

An insiders' guide to the confusing world of property taxation from BRUSNIAK TURNER.

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THE GREAT TEXAS PROPERTY-TAX SWITCHEROO

Vote for an Exemption, Get a Tax Increase — The Upcoming Constitutional Amendment Election

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“Don’t tax you. Don’t tax me. Tax the fellow behind the tree.”

— U.S. Senator Russell Long (1948–1987)

Texans hate taxes. We really hate property taxes. So much so that every time someone suggests an exemption, we eagerly vote *yes*.

Here’s the secret no one talks about: property and sales taxes make up roughly 80% of all state and local revenue in Texas. The rest—franchise, oil and gas severance, and a few other niche taxes—barely make a dent. Meanwhile, we’ve locked ourselves into a constitutional box: no statewide property tax, no income tax, no real-property transfer tax, and no wealth tax.

THE EXEMPTION EXPLOSION

Over the past decade, Texans have approved more than a dozen new property-tax exemptions.

The school-district homestead exemption jumped from \$15,000 to \$40,000, then to

\$100,000—and now we'll vote on whether to make it \$140,000.

Voters will also decide whether to raise the additional exemption for homeowners over 65 or disabled from \$10,000 to \$60,000.

If both pass, homeowners in those categories will pay no school taxes on the first \$200,000 of value. Sweet deal—unless you're the one trying to fund a local school.

And that's not all. We've carved out special exemptions for veterans, first responders, surviving spouses, biomedical inventories, and even gold and silver stored in the Texas Bullion Depository (did you remember to store yours?).

COMING THIS NOVEMBER

On November 4, 2025, Texans will vote on still more exemptions and prohibitions:

- Exempt animal feed sold at retail (not for your pets)
- Add another exemption for surviving spouses of certain veterans
- Exempt the value of border walls built on private land
- Knock \$125,000 off every business's taxable personal property
- Grant temporary exemptions for homes destroyed in fires (but not if you set the fire)
- And while we're at it, ban capital-gains, inheritance, and stock-transaction taxes forever

Cue the Oprah moment: *"You get a tax break! You get a tax break! Everybody gets a tax break!"*

BUT HERE'S THE CATCH

Every "tax break" you vote for is a bill someone else has to pay—and that someone is usually you. The cost of running schools, police, fire departments, and hospitals doesn't disappear. When we narrow the tax base (code for "fewer people paying the same bills"), rates rise for everyone still on the hook.

So when you vote to increase your own homestead exemption, you're also voting to help fund that exemption.

Years ago, I represented a massive Texas ranch—87% of the county. After we won a refund for unfair assessments, the county had to raise tax rates to pay it. My client ended up funding 87% of its own refund. That's how math—and tax rates—work.

WHY YOU NEVER FEEL THE RELIEF

You might wonder why your tax bill never actually drops even as your homestead exemption keeps rising. That's because local governments simply adjust rates upward to fill the gap. Add in population growth and inflation, and your "tax cut" evaporates.

VOTE HOWEVER YOU LIKE—JUST KNOW WHAT YOU'RE VOTING FOR

Texas keeps narrowing what it can tax, leaving property and sales taxes to carry the load. The result? Higher rates on a shrinking base.

So come November 4, vote your conscience—but do it with your eyes open. Every new exemption feels good at the ballot box, but sooner or later, you’re the fellow behind the tree.



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