



Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

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NEWS

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December 23, 2008

School and Tech College Tax Hikes Lead Way

WISTAX Estimates Statewide Property Tax Increases of About 4.0%

MADISON—Statewide, 2008-09 property tax levies are up 5.2% for schools, 5.0% for technical colleges, and 3.1% for counties, according to a new report from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX). If municipal and related taxes rise 3.5%, as WISTAX estimates, total gross property taxes, before state tax credits, would rise about 4.3%. Now in its 76th year, the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance is a nonprofit, nonpartisan group dedicated to policy research and citizen education.

Of the six governmental units that use the property tax, school taxes represent the largest share, typically over 40%. Schools increased their levies 5.2% from \$4.07 billion last year to \$4.28 billion for 2008-09. The increase was smaller this year than last (7.4%). Of 426 school districts, 72 had double-digit increases, with 20 exceeding 20%, while 68 cut taxes. Overall, levy changes ranged from a 40.0% increase in Iowa-Grant to a 13.9% cut in Beloit. Large increases can be due to referenda or major state aid changes.

WISTAX reports that, in 2008-09, statewide “tech” college levies grew 5.0%, from \$680.6 million to \$714.6 million. Annual increases in the preceding five years have ranged from 4.3% to 5.3%. The size of levy increases this year varied from 16.3% in the Southwest Wisconsin district to 3.5% in the Nicolet (Rhineland) district.

In Wisconsin’s 72 counties, combined levies rose 3.1%, from \$1.80 billion to \$1.86 billion. This is the smallest change since a 1.1% drop in 1983-84. Part of the reason for the slowdown in county levies is state-imposed limits that restrict increases to 2% plus any additional growth due to new construction. Property taxes increased most in Lafayette (9.7%), Green (9.0%), Adams (8.3%), Sauk (7.4%), and Kewaunee (7.0%) counties. Washington (-0.5%) and Sheboygan (-1.2%) counties cut their levies.

“The major unknown making it impossible to get a final fix on statewide property taxes,” according to WISTAX president, Todd Berry, “are still-unavailable municipal levies.” If WISTAX’s 3.5% assumption about town-village-city tax increases is correct, total gross levies would be up 4.3% to \$9.65 billion. Last year, gross levies rose 6.2% to \$9.25 billion. Subtracting the state’s tax credit appropriation would yield a net levy increase of 3.7%. Lottery credits would further reduce the property tax bills of resident homeowners.

For a copy of the WISTAX report “Piecing together the 2009 property tax puzzle” write: WISTAX, 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, Wisconsin 53704; e-mail, wistax@wistax.org; or call 608.241.9789. □