

Columbus Dispatch columnist, Thomas Suddes' Sept 14 column connects Ohio's property tax problem, out-of-control EdChoice voucher scheme, and the state's failure to develop a constitutional school funding system.

State officials have failed public school children, subsidized the private school tuition of higher income folks, and tried to lay the blame for high property tax on school districts. Columnist Suddes identifies how state officials have botched these interrelated issues.

Ohio Democrats smug GOP should watch for

Jean and John Homeowner need to know that part of the reason property taxes on homes skyrocket is because of tax breaks and other budget fiddles the Ohio General Assembly has handed out to fat cats like Halloween candy.

Funny thing, that's the same General Assembly that now claims it's going to address Ohio's property tax squeeze (whatever "address" means).

Too many Ohio homeowners don't know that their property taxes are higher than they would be because our problem-solving legislature has:

- Diverted hundreds of millions of what should be state aid to local public schools to private, often religious schools, which a Franklin County Common Pleas has ruled breaches the Ohio Constitution's demand that churches and public schools must be strictly separated. Who has to make up the state money that public schools lose due to such non-public-school "vouchers?" Homeowners.
- Broken a pledge to fully fund the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan, devised by former House Speaker Robert Cupp, a Lima Republican, and former Rep. John Patterson, a Democrat from Ashtabula County's Jefferson. Refusal to fully fund the Cupp-Patterson plan forces school boards to seek more, and bigger, property tax levies from Ohio homeowners.
- With the enthusiastic collaboration of non-school local government officials, they authorized enormous tax gimmicks that can cut — or redirect — property taxes to help real estate developers and Big Business. Associated gobbledygook: Tax Increment Financing; Community Reinvestment Areas; and Enterprise Zones. Great irony: The single best investment in improving any Ohio community is investing in its public schools

Les Wexner's New Albany example

Of course, reforming or abolishing any of those Statehouse-imposed burdens on Ohio homeowners would step on the toes of Capitol Square lobbyists who cheerlead for developers and other real estate speculators. And a legislator who wants to stay in his Statehood hammock knows better than to rile fat cats' errand boys and girls.

The legislature, regardless of party, has typically kowtowed to developers. Example: In 1986, the General Assembly did central Ohio billionaire Leslie S. Wexner by helping block the annexation of the New Albany (Plain Local) schools to Columbus City Schools.

Beginning in the '80s, Wexner developed New Albany, once a dusty crossroads where U.S. 62 intersects Ohio 161, into a posh, new-money suburb. One-time Wexner friend Jeffrey Epstein was once a New Albany resident and, according to Epstein pal Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein "ran New Albany."

Median household income in Columbus is \$65,327, the Census reports; in New Albany, it's \$232,524. And neo-Williamsburg architecture is de rigueur.

Four Democrats 'smug' Republicans should watch out for

Among what looks like an otherwise nap-time organization, four Ohio Democratic candidates — including two physicians — are campaigning hard for their party's key nominations in next year's May 5 primary election.

Ex-Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Bexley Democrat, is seeking a comeback by unseating appointed Sen. Jon Husted, an Upper Arlington Republican.

Meanwhile, Dr. Amy Acton, also of Bexley, is energetically seeking to be Democrats' candidate for governor. A Youngstown native, Acton served for a time as state health director in the cabinet of Republican Gov. Mike DeWine. She's a Youngstown State graduate who earned her medical degree at Northeast Ohio Medical University.

And Dr. Brian Hambley, of Loveland, of suburban Cincinnati, is vigorously — and that's arguably an understatement — seeking the Democratic nomination for Ohio secretary of state, Ohio's chief election officer. Hambley, a Notre Dame graduate who earned his medical degree at Tulane University, specializes in treating blood cancers and providing bone-marrow transplants.

Hambley was an ardent volunteer urging voters to pass 2024's statewide initiative to end the gerrymandering of Ohio's General Assembly and congressional districts. Voters turned the plan down, 54% to 46%, in part because of misleading ballot wording crafted by lame-duck Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose, of Upper Arlington.

A second, recently announced, candidate for Democrats' nomination for Ohio secretary of state is former Ohio House Minority Leader C. Allison Russo, an Upper Arlington Democrat, widely popular in the once-GOP-bedrock Columbus suburb. Russo earned a doctoral degree in health policy at George Washington University and a master's degree in public health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

These four Democrats are formidable candidates. Smug Republicans who think otherwise are just that: smug.

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