



Wisconsin REALTORS® Win Bipartisan Support to Pass Landmark Property Tax Relief—August 2014

Wisconsin's notoriously high property tax rate had long been a thorn in the side of the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association (WRA). "Not only was it a burden on homeowners," points out Tom Larson, the 13,500-member association's Vice President of Government Affairs, "but it was a real barrier to economic growth." This past legislative session, with the help of polling services from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, WRA was able to do something about it.

Although a state property tax freeze had been in place for a few years, explains Larson, prior to that, it was not unusual for Wisconsin property owners to be hit with double-digit annual increases. "Our property tax rate was still clocking in as the fourth-highest in the country when calculated as a percentage of home value," he notes. "It was especially hard on homeowners with a fixed income. We'd been hearing about it from our members for years."

This year, however, with revenues on the rise, the state found itself with a substantial budget surplus, creating the financial opportunity to pursue property tax reform at last. "Our empirical data told us that property owners were unhappy with Wisconsin's historically high tax burden," explains Larson. "But other groups were seeking other uses for the surplus, from income tax and sales tax relief, to greater infrastructure spending, to the creation of a rainy-day fund. We needed direct polling data to show legislators what the voters wanted most."

WRA had used the polling services provided by the REALTOR® Party before, for both political and policy issues. "They're great," says Larson, "easy to work with, top-notch professionals, who got us what we needed, fast." The poll results indicated that 60 percent of Wisconsin voters felt that property taxes were too high. A property tax cut was favored by 42 percent of those polled, well above the other suggested uses for the surplus. With these numbers in hand, WRA was able to get the legislature moving in the direction of property tax relief. The association committed its own resources to the effort, raising public awareness through letters-to-the-editor and radio ads to targeted districts. It put out calls-to-action to its members, and engaged in written and face-to-face advocacy with lawmakers, lobbying full-force and helping to draft the legislative initiative.

On March 25, 2014, for the first time in decades, Wisconsin's governor signed a reform bill lowering the state's property tax, meaning an average annual savings of \$131 for Wisconsin homeowners. Now, reports Larson, instead of groans and griping from members about the property tax, WRA is fielding cheers of gratitude.

Property tax relief was the centerpiece of a remarkable 25 legislative and regulatory wins for WRA this session, an accomplishment especially notable for its overwhelming bi-partisan support in a legislature known for heightened partisanship. "We're proud to



have made such progress on so many issues that are important to homeowners, property owners and the real estate industry," says Larson, "and grateful to NAR for its help."

To learn more about how Wisconsin REALTORS® used NAR's polling services to bring tax relief to Wisconsin homeowners, contact Tom Larson, WRA's Vice President of Government Affairs, at tlarson@wra.org or (608) 241-2047.



Left: Wisconsin State Capitol. Above: Governor Scott Walker signing a bill into law at the WRA's REALTOR and Government Day event. Standing (left to right)--WRA Chairman Steve Lane, legislative staff person Rob Kovach, and state legislator Andre Jacques