

Legislators Still Struggle With Equalization of Tax Assessments

By VINCENT THOMAS
 Assemblyman, 68th District
 For more than 10 years our legislators have struggled, so far in vain, to solve one of the knottiest problems in the field of property taxation by local government. That is how to equalize assessment of real property by local agencies with that of utility properties which are valued by the state board of equalization.

cal assessors' difficulties in keeping abreast of the market, so that the ratios of their assessments to market valuations fell behind that used by the state for utility properties.

BY 1949 THE difference had become so noticeable that the unfairness of assessing one kind of property at one level, and a second kind at another, was called to the attention of the Legislature. A law was enacted requiring equalization of assessment ratios between the various localities, and between them and the state. Its effective date has been postponed at every regular session since then.

A 1957 attempt to work out a satisfactory law failed. Instead, a joint interim committee was set up, given

substantial research funds, and instructed to report to the current session.

A 1957 attempt to work out of the joint group has recently been released. Three major findings are stated. First, that the state assesses public utility property at roughly 50 per cent of full cash value, while the statewide average percentage for property locally assessed is only 25 per cent. Second, the requirement of the State Constitution for equality in treatment of all property for taxation is not being followed. Third, it is possible to determine the full cash value of all property, since that value is the common denominator for assessment of all types of property.

employed by the joint committee made some recommendations on changes in tax laws for consideration of the group. They based their findings and recommendations on 240 pages of detailed study and analysis of state and local assessment practices, as well as on their independent valuations of utility and other property.

THESE EXPERTS recommend that the legal assessment level be fixed at about 30 per cent of full cash value, but that all property be gradually brought to that level, say over 10 years. These suggestions will be reviewed at a two-day public hearing by the committee before it makes its own conclusions. It has been indicated, however, that no further research beyond the staff

report will be needed.

Signs that fireworks can be expected at the hearing immediately followed release of the report. Opponents of enforced equalization claimed with some foundation that \$95,000,000 per year in local taxes would be transferred from utility to other local taxpayers. Those favoring such action responded that such taxpayers had, over recent years, probably benefited some three-quarters of a billion dollars at the expense of the consumers who buy utility services. They point out

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to contact J. H. Burchett, FA 8-2286.

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