

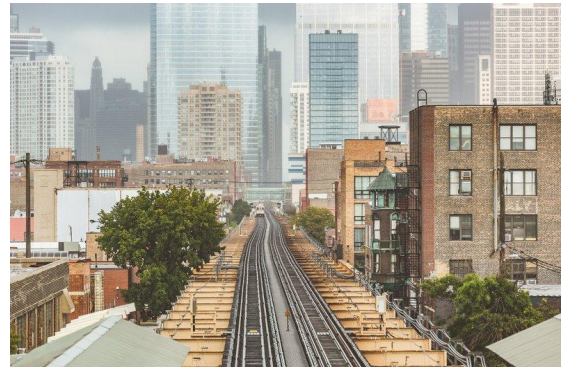
## **Kaegi's 'unreal' assessment math will hurt more than businesses**

Instead of declaring a war on property taxpayers as our economy attempts a recovery, we should seek policies that support growth and promote investment.

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In his current reassessment of the city, Assessor Fritz Kaegi claims the value of commercial property in the West Chicago township—from the West Loop to Austin—has almost doubled compared to 2019. “Unreal” is the appropriate reaction to that false claim.



As property tax bills land across Cook County, the huge shift of tax burden onto Chicago’s businesses—both small and large—is just beginning. Chicago’s downtown is experiencing the lowest number of building transactions in years, as well as record-high vacancies and subleasing activity. While some industries have thrived, the vast majority have not, and businesses in every neighborhood are struggling to pay the bills and keep their doors open. Mix in rising COVID cases and a new mask mandate, and it is clear we are still in the grip of the pandemic.

In stark contrast, residential property has achieved record increases in value. Nevertheless, Kaegi went out of his way—potentially violating the state constitution—to reduce residential assessments during the pandemic at the expense of the business community. And falling in to the “unreal” category, he then got to send voters a nice letter about it.

It is clear that the assessor influences assessments for his own agenda. The data simply does not support his decisions, no matter how often he mischaracterizes third-party studies. And instead of providing real transparency—so taxpayers can actually see what he is doing behind the scenes to determine their property value—he deflects questions from anyone who questions him, attacks independent agencies that can correct his assessments and frequently misleads or outright deceives.

Earlier this year, a broad coalition of business associations, taxpayer-protection advocates and labor organizations proposed transparency measures in Springfield that would provide real insight and accountability into how the assessor calculates property values. Kaegi opposed it, despite claiming to support transparency. Then he fabricated claims about “show-stopper provisions” that were not part of the proposal to cover his tracks.

There is more at stake, however, than Kaegi’s political ambitions. Businesses already heavily subsidize our residential property taxes in Cook County. That is not even up to the assessor—it’s built into Cook County’s unique tax code, which assesses commercial property at 250 percent of residential. As our local governments increase tax levies, commercial properties are already struggling to bear that weight for the much larger number of residential taxpayers. The assessor’s efforts to shift even more of it onto businesses hurt all of us—businesses and homeowners alike.

We aren't just talking about downtown, either. Office tenants, restaurants, hotels, retailers and small businesses from Harvey to Cicero to Evanston are all impacted. In fact, one of these businesses might be your own employer—who could very well be considering how to cut costs to pay for our excessive commercial property taxes, now the 3rd highest in the country.

Instead of declaring a war on property taxpayers as our economy attempts a recovery, we should seek policies that support economic growth and promote investment. Kaegi claims businesses are impeding progress, but whose definition of progress are we following? Progress for us benefits the whole county—by encouraging greater investment, expanding our tax base, maintaining and attracting new businesses and increasing job opportunities.

Ultimately, there must be true transparency into how the Assessor determines property tax values for residential and commercial alike. Without it, the Assessor's actions will continue to be 'unreal.'

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