

Indiana County's [top news story](#) of 2015 was the reassessment of county real estate for tax purposes—the first such revaluation in 47 years. Estimated July 1 tax bills for the county's 48,000 taxable parcels sparked protests, appeals, lawsuits, delays, and a record number of candidates for the November county commissioner election.

It is a perennial local conflict that has resisted statewide resolution for centuries.

On April 19, 2016, from 5:00–6:30 p.m. in the Ohio Room of the Hadley Union Building on the Indiana University of Pennsylvania campus, the local conflict story will be reconsidered as a public discussion about Pennsylvania's property tax, for which reassessments are conducted, primarily to pay for public schools.

The discussion will feature experts on the property tax and on the many proposals to reform it in Pennsylvania, dating from the 17th-century colonial period to 21st-century sessions of the General Assembly. The experts include:

- Brian O'Neill, "Pittsburgh's most influential newspaper columnist." For 27 years, O'Neill has written two to three opinion pieces a week for Pittsburgh daily newspapers, including the *Post-Gazette*, his current perch. He has written about his Allegheny County reassessment of his North Side home and his appeal of it. The process was "Kafkaesque," O'Neill wrote. "Your odds would be better at a casino."
- Robert Strauss, professor of economics and public policy at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Strauss has worked on tax policy issues at the federal and state levels, including as director of research at the Pennsylvania Tax Commission. In 1987, Strauss was appointed to the Pennsylvania Local Tax Reform Commission to advise Gov. Robert Casey on local tax reform prior to a special session of the General Assembly, which resulted in authorizing legislation in 1988 to reform Pennsylvania's system of local taxation. His research applied to civic issues include a 2012–13 online "[Property Tax Estimator for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania](#)".
- Jeffrey Weber, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at East Stroudsburg University in East Stroudsburg, Pa. He has studied property taxes for the Pennsylvania Senate and for the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. He served as an advisor on property taxes to various state representative and state senate campaigns and has served on a committee analyzing property taxes for two school districts. He is writing a book about the state's property tax. Working title: *Pennsylvania's Tar Baby: The Property Tax and Its Endless Reform*.

The panel discussion will be moderated by [David Loomis](#), associate professor of journalism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The framework for the symposium is knowledge-based journalism, which aims to deepen public understanding of important issues in the news and to facilitate solutions to public problems.

Background information, panelist bios, policy papers, research, and proposed solutions for the problems surrounding reassessment and property taxation will be curated on the website of the

[IUP chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists](#) in the Department of Journalism and Public Relations at IUP. A video recording of the event, shot by the [IUP Communications Media Department](#), will be posted on the site following the event and will be aired on IUP-TV.

This free public event is cosponsored by the [IUP Journalism and Public Relations Department](#), the [IUP Political Science Department](#), the [IUP chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists](#), and the the Elizabeth Ray Sweeney Trust Fund.

The public is invited. A question-and-answer period will follow summary remarks and discussion by panelists. Microphones will be distributed to audience members who have questions for panelists.