



In Memoriam: Wisconsin's Personal Property Tax (1837-2024)

It is with “heavy hearts” that we bid farewell to an old companion, the Personal Property Tax in the state of Wisconsin. The Personal Property Tax, known affectionately to loved ones as “PPT,” passed away at the age of 186 on January 1, 2024. An investigation ruled the official cause of death to be 2023 Act 12, which was enacted last June following years of effort by myself and my legislative colleagues.

Born in 1837 while Wisconsin was still a territory, the PPT enjoyed its youth as a primary source of revenue for the state, as households and businesses paid property taxes on their clothing, jewelry, furniture, and other valuable items. Following the birth of its younger siblings, particularly the Income Tax in 1911 and the Sales Tax in 1962, the PPT became an increasingly inefficient and complicated way to collect revenue. Its condition worsened over the subsequent decades—first came the repeal of the household PPT, and then the remaining tax became increasingly riddled with exemptions as the legislature attempted to repeal the tax gradually. By the end of its long life, the tax only constituted a small part of the state’s revenue, but its complexity still created an annual headache for small businesses and local governments alike.

For those who navigated its complicated labyrinth of paperwork, deadlines, and assessments, the PPT was a constant companion, albeit one not always welcomed. It demanded attention, resources, and occasionally a bit of frustration. However, it still played a small role in supporting our local governments. To make up for these future losses, Act 12 increased state aid to our counties and municipalities. Consequently, the PPT will not be missed by anyone.

As we "mourn" the loss of the PPT, we honor its memory and the role it once played. We also celebrate the void it leaves behind, which will be filled with new opportunities for businesses to thrive unencumbered and focus on what they do best—creating jobs and growing our economy.

To those who knew it best, the PPT always knew how to brighten up a room, and that was by leaving it. As the final PPT payments for the 2023 assessment year leave

mailboxes this month, the Wisconsin economy will be a little brighter and more welcoming to small businesses.

The PPT is preceded in death by its counterparts in all of our neighboring states—a testament to its stubborn will to survive. The tax remains survived by its relatives and loved ones, including the Income Tax, the Sales Tax, and its twin sibling, the Real Property Tax—all of which are still too high.

May the Personal Property Tax rest in peace, and may our state continue to move toward a more streamlined, business-friendly environment that fosters growth and innovation. On Wisconsin!