

TITLENews

JUNE 2019

AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION

Industry Gets Heard on Capitol Hill



Coverage of the 2019 ALTA Advocacy Summit

- Princess of Title Goes to Washington
- Political Analyst Forecasts 2020 Presidential Election
- What's in Store for Remainder of 2019 Housing Market?
- 2018 ALTA TIPAC Awards
- Photos

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**DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S
DIGITAL ISSUE OF**

TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording that details how the conflicting treatment between federal and state law makes closing transactions involving marijuana money more complex and prone to pitfalls.

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to get your copy of
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PUBLISHER + EDITOR IN CHIEF
Jeremy Yohe

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL AND PRINT MEDIA
Shawn Sullivan

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

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Cynthia Durham Blair NTP
Blair Cato Pickren Casterline LLC
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We Were Heard

IT SOUNDS CLICHÉ, but showing up and speaking up can result in change. On the flip side, silence can be viewed as passive approval of a situation. Staying silent can lead to harming the very people you hope to help.



JEREMY YOHE

ALTA vice president of communications

Speaking up and participating is crucial to achieving great things. During Lobby Day in May, more than 200 title professionals shared their voice and held more than 225 meetings with members of Congress and their staff.

During our meetings, we were focused on two bipartisan issues: wire fraud and beneficial ownership legislation. These items highlight the positive role our industry takes in protecting consumers and real estate.

Regarding wire fraud, we asked offices to sign a letter to the Federal Reserve Board urging it to strengthen the wire transfer system. Even more impactful, however, were the chilling stories that were shared about consumers losing their life savings and how title companies help to identify these crimes.

Secondly, we asked for support of legislation requiring LLCs to file reports with FinCEN about their beneficial ownership at the time the business structure is created. These reports would be private, but accessible to law enforcement and title companies (with customer permission). ALTA supports this legislation to ease the burden on title companies that must report cash transactions under the FinCEN Geographic Targeting Orders (GTOs).

HR 2513 was slated to be voted on by the House Financial Services Committee when ALTA Advocacy Summit attendees were on Capitol Hill. Prior to this, there were reports that it would pass the committee with all the Democrats and handful of Republicans voting for the bill. However, after ALTA members discussed the bill on May 8, the vote was postponed to allow time to negotiate some changes to garner more Republican support. If the bill passes with overwhelming bipartisan support, it will be due to the outreach of ALTA members on Capitol Hill Day.

In a separate meeting, ALTA members helped convince sponsors of a similar bill aimed at updating the federal anti-money laundering laws to close loopholes, increase penalties and provide new tools and reduce the reporting burden for financial institutions. At that time, a discussion draft included a provision to expand the FinCEN Geographic Targeting Orders to cover commercial real estate transactions on the same terms as residential transactions. Due to efforts by ALTA members and staff, edits were made to the language requiring FinCEN to issue a unique GTO on commercial real estate.

These are just a few examples of speaking up and getting involved. You can become a Congressional Liaison and build relationships back home in your district. You can also join the free Title Action Network (TAN), which provides brief advocacy updates on issues important to you.

We were heard in May during Lobby Day. Let's make sure we're heard the rest of the year, too!

Registration is Open for ALTA ONE

The title insurance and settlement industry is shifting, which means now is your chance to think creatively and seize the opportunity to adapt. Buzzwords alone aren't enough. You need to embrace innovation and learn how to do it well. You crave tactical ideas built around your market, your goals and your reality. ALTA ONE is the event for big, ready-to-use ideas.

ALTA ONE is built by people like you, for people like you. It's the only title industry event that connects leaders to swap new business concepts and practices that work. ALTA ONE brings strategy to life in ways that get you to tackle problems from a different perspective.

Don't settle for the status quo. Define your own future. Let your talents become UNBOUND at ALTA ONE.



ALTA Announces Direct iT as an Elite Provider

ALTA's Elite Provider Program features distinguished service providers committed to furnishing extensive benefits to the title insurance and settlement services industry. Elite Providers promote the highest industry standards and provide effective solutions for ALTA members' critical needs.

Direct iT has been providing network security and IT support services for the closing and settlement industry since 2004. The company simplifies large, enterprise-grade security solutions for small business needs and budgets. Proficient in lender-audit compliance, TILA/RESPA and state data security laws, Direct iT also features expertise in wire fraud and identity theft. The company recently launched a dark web, security and training bundle that integrates dark web monitoring, email phishing simulations and employee training videos and quizzes.

"ALTA's Best Practices have played a huge part in helping our clients navigate the changing requirements of the settlement services industry," said David Javaheri, president and CEO of Direct iT. "It's a huge honor for Direct iT to be included in ALTA's exclusive group of Elite Providers. Direct iT is constantly developing new programs to help our clients stay secure, and we are very excited to get the chance to help more ALTA members with our programs in the future."

Direct iT offers free network security and wire-fraud awareness training for ALTA members. The company will demonstrate how cybercriminals are using the dark web to target real estate transactions and review the security best practices businesses need to utilize to stay safe. Additionally, ALTA members who decide to use Direct iT's services receive one month free.

For more information, go to alta.org/elite.



NEWS TO SHARE?

If you have information you'd like us to consider for TiTLE News, send company announcements to communications@alta.org.



Not Just Traditional Real Estate... True Digital Transformation

It's no longer business as usual for real estate transactions. Email, fax and FedEx are history, just like the Pony Express. Gone are the days of a one-off "electronic this" or "digital that" tied together by a manual process. Instead, it's an all-out sprint toward digital transformation. And RamQuest is taking the lead.

**Learn why fully electronic order processing is becoming the norm.
Watch our FREE on-demand webinar: RamQuest.com/Transform**



Find Vendors to Help Your Business at ALTA Marketplace

The ALTA Marketplace provides members a user-friendly search interface where you can look for vendors, products and services by name, location and relevance. The Marketplace is your one-stop shop for a wide range of services such as software to help you prevent wire fraud, including anti-phishing, email filters, firewalls and intrusion software. For more info, go to alta.org/marketplace.



Membership by the Numbers

ALTA is the title insurance and settlement services industry resource for advocacy, education, communications, networking and policy standards. Here's a look at some membership numbers from the past month.

- New Members: 72
- New Associate Members: 4
- New Attorney Members: 36
- Total Members: 6,019
- State With Most New Members: 19, Florida

For a list of the latest new and associate members, as well as real estate attorneys who recently joined, go to alta.org/new-members.

ALTA 2019 TIPAC Donors

The Title Industry Political Action Committee (TIPAC) is ALTA's voluntary, non-partisan political action committee (PAC). TIPAC raises money to help elect and re-elect candidates to Congress who understand and support the issues affecting the title industry. TIPAC has received \$428,773 from 636 donors so far in 2019. Check out who has supported the industry at alta.org/tipac.

CALENDAR

2019 ALTA CONFERENCES

INNOVATION BOOT CAMP

Aug. 12-13

Chicago, Ill.

HOMEOWNER OUTREACH PROGRAM TRAINING

Aug. 14

Chicago, Ill.

ALTA ONE

Oct. 21-25

Austin, Texas

2019 STATE CONFERENCES

PENNSYLVANIA

June 2-4

Hershey, Pa.

ILLINOIS

July 10-12

Delaven, Wis.

MICHIGAN

July 14-16

Acme, Mich.

UTAH

July 31-Aug. 3

Park City, Utah

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Aug. 1-3

Stevenson, Wash.



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Goes to



THE ALTA ADVOCACY SUMMIT can seem intimidating to those who have no experience on Capitol Hill. In-person meetings with the members of Congress who write the country's laws can feel intimidating and nerve-wracking. ALTA members sometimes hesitate to attend the event because they don't feel like they can answer questions or be the "expert in the room."

However, ALTA member Amanda Calloway, Georgia and South Carolina counsel for Calloway Title & Escrow LLC in Atlanta, Ga., as well as the president of the Southeast Land Title Association, decided to attend ALTA Advocacy Summit this year for the first time.

Washington

By Megan Hernandez



Amanda Calloway (second from right), Deborah Bailey (second from left) and the rest of the Georgia delegation meet with U.S. Rep. David Scott during the 2019 ALTA Advocacy Summit.



Amanda Calloway stands outside the Rayburn House Office Building.

Dubbed “The Princess of Title,” Calloway grew up in the title insurance industry. Her father, Marcus Calloway, started running title searches part time while he attended law school in the 1970s, eventually beginning his practice in 1976 and founding Calloway Title & Escrow in 1997. Amanda’s uncle and aunt, George and Diane Calloway, also are long-time fixtures in the title industry. (Diane Calloway was awarded ALTA’s Excellence in Advocacy Award in 2014.)

“There is so much goodwill for me here at ALTA,” Amanda Calloway said.

Even so, Calloway had hesitated to attend ALTA Advocacy Summit during her 16 years working in the title industry for multiple reasons: With a very full schedule, taking time away from her business can

be difficult. She felt slightly daunted at the prospect of sitting in a U.S. senator’s or representative’s office, answering questions. And, in truth, the event seemed too far removed from what she did on a daily basis.

Coming to ALTA Advocacy Summit this year became easier when her mentor, ALTA member Deborah Bailey, managing member of Bailey Helms Legal LLC in Roswell, Ga., asked her to attend.

“I would have been much more concerned and nervous without my mentor,” Calloway said.

Additionally, the New Member and First-Time Attendee Orientation held on the first day of ALTA Advocacy Summit was a big confidence booster. During this reception, ALTA ambassadors help familiarize first-time attendees with the conference.

“The ALTA ambassadors provided a wealth of information,” Calloway said. “They made me excited because they were so excited.”

After two days of meetings, keynote speakers and prep sessions, ALTA Advocacy Summit features Capitol Hill Day, during which ALTA members descend on Capitol Hill to meet with members of Congress and their staffs about specific issues currently affecting the title insurance industry. Prior to Capitol Hill Day, Calloway also did some research and prep work on her own.

“ALTA Advocacy Summit is impressive,” Calloway said. “The event has made me pay more attention to the political process. It has given me the chance to take a deeper dive into complicated topics.”

During Capitol Hill Day, Calloway, Bailey and ALTA staff members Megan Hernandez and Theresa Johnson bounced among several Georgia congressional offices, including those of Rep. Lucy McBath, Rep. David Scott and Sen. Johnny Isakson. Because congressional schedules change frequently, Rep. Sanford Bishop Jr.’s office was a last-minute addition to the agenda.

Calloway started the day taking a back seat, mainly watching and listening during her first meeting. As she continued throughout the day, she became more confident and discussed this year’s advocacy topics, such as real estate wire fraud and anti-money laundering laws, with aplomb. In her final meeting of the day, she took control and led the session.

“[Meeting with congressional staff] was much less stressful than I thought it would be. When I do this again, I won’t be nearly as nervous,” Calloway said. “I liked being able to hold our members of Congress accountable for what happens in our state.”

While Calloway previously felt ALTA Advocacy

Summit wasn't necessarily at the top of her to-do list, she now says the event is "a very accessible way to become involved and advocate for our industry. You have to experience it to really understand how easy and beneficial it is to attend."

Calloway hopes more ALTA members will consider trying ALTA Advocacy Summit. "It's worth taking the time away from your business to gain a broader perspective on what we do. All an attendee has to do is show up. ALTA staff has done all the work for you. They set up the framework and provide you with the tools you need for success." ■



MEGAN HERNANDEZ is ALTA's PR and Marketing Manager. She can be reached at mhernandez@alta.com.

How You Can Get Involved

- **Title Action Network:** The Title Action Network (TAN) is the premier grassroots organization promoting the value of the land title industry. TAN is free to join and provides brief alerts on issues impacting you and your business. alta.org/tan
- **Congressional Liaisons:** Congressional Liaisons are on the front lines of advocacy for our industry. The concept is straightforward: Legislators need info and you are the experts. Members of Congress—new members especially—need to learn how the title industry affects constituents in their district. Do you have a relationship with a member of Congress? Let ALTA know by taking the Congressional Liaisons survey at <https://bit.ly/2Ke9Flc>.



Amanda Calloway and the Georgia delegation meet with staff for U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop Jr.



Political Analyst Forecasts 2020 Presidential Election

Amy Walter Says Dems Feel Like World Will End if They Don't Win

SPEAKING TO MORE THAN 200 ATTENDEES AT THE 2019 ALTA ADVOCACY SUMMIT, political analyst Amy Walter provided thoughts on how the 2020 presidential election may play out and why the Democratic field will be so large.

Walter said that the success Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders had in 2016 has fueled a belief that others can achieve the similar results.

“There’s also a sense among a lot of Democrats that beating Donald Trump is so important; it’s beyond just putting a Democrat in the White House, that they see Donald Trump as essentially an existential threat to the country, and that they want to be the one that can make sure that the right candidate is there to beat him,” Walter said.

She said the Democratic party is coalescing around beating Trump. The ability for individuals to raise a lot of money and bypass traditional gatekeepers of funding keeps people in the race longer.

“Everyone thinks that they have a chance,” Walter said.

Looking back to 2016, there were 16 Republican candidates. Five dropped out quickly. How each potential candidate performed during the debates served to thin the crowd. Walter said that at some point, it comes down to money and attention.

“Even if you have the greatest of intentions, you can’t stay in if you don’t have those two things,” she said.

Walter pointed out that history has proven it’s hard to defeat a presidential incumbent when the economy is strong. “I feel like it’s been dog years since the 2016 election,” Walter said. “Trump’s numbers have not moved. His approval rating has never been above 42 percent, never dropped below 35 percent. He never gets a bump when things go well and never dips into the valley. Opinions about him are pretty settled and we’re not expecting to see those numbers change in 2020.”

The president carried independents in 2016, but Walter isn’t sure he’ll do this again in 2020. She added that most people’s minds are made up on Trump. Independents have not been a fan of the president. “This is the danger zone for Trump,” Walter said.

Looking at key battlegrounds, Walter said we learned that states such as Ohio are no longer at the epicenter. She said other states such as Michigan, Florida, Arizona and Wisconsin have emerged as key states that will affect the outcome of the election.

“There is a degree of sentiment that this is the most important election of our lifetime,” Walter said. “There’s the feeling of an existential threat that if the Democrats don’t win in 2020, the world will end.” ■



Amy Walter

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wherever you are.**



The new oldrepublictitle.com/blog

What's in Store for Housing Market for Remainder of 2019?

THE 2019 HOUSING MARKET will experience slower home price growth, moderate inventory increases and millennials will account for 45 percent of all mortgages, realtor.com's chief economist Danielle Hale told attendees at the ALTA Advocacy Summit in Washington, D.C.

Hale, who spent nearly a decade as an economist and policy researcher at the National Association of Realtors, outlined four housing trends for the remainder of the year.

Modest Inventory Gains Continue

Inventory hit the lowest level in recorded history last winter, but finally bottomed out and reached positive territory in October. Hale said national inventory increases will remain low in 2019 at less than 7 percent. In most markets, the number of homes put on the market or newly constructed has increased



2018 ALTA TIPAC Awards

During the 2019 Advocacy Summit, ALTA honored individuals and entities for their efforts in helping to raise donations in 2018 for the Title Industry Political Action Committee (TIPAC).

"We are proud to present these awards in honor of the title professionals who understand the commitment to making TIPAC stronger each and every year," said David Townsend NTP, chair of ALTA's TIPAC Committee. "It's not just strength in our dollars, it's strength in our numbers who believe in what TIPAC does. In 2018, TIPAC raised \$551,980 from 979 contributors. This made the 2017-2018 election cycle TIPAC's most profitable cycle and secured TIPAC as a million-dollar PAC. We could not have done

this without the help of our outstanding TIPAC trustees who volunteer their time to raise money for TIPAC. We are proud to present these awards in honor of their commitment to making TIPAC stronger."

Top Underwriter Award: Fidelity National Title Group was recognized as the underwriter that raised the most money from its employees in 2018. Accepting the award on behalf of Fidelity National Title Group was Erika Meinhardt. Last year, Fidelity raised \$130,193 from 248 contributors. Already in 2019, the company has raised \$186,150 from 29 employees.

Top Mid-Cap Underwriter Award: CATIC was recognized as the mid-cap underwriter that raised the most money

from its employees in 2018. Accepting the award on behalf of the company were Anthony Lombardi and Ashley Sadler. Last year, CATIC raised \$9,905 from 34 contributors. So far this year, the company has raised \$1,725 from six contributors.

Top Agent Award: Land Title Guaranty Co. in Colorado was recognized as the agency that raised the most money from its employees in 2018. Diane Evans of Land Title Guarantee accepted the award. Last year, the company raised \$24,405 from 50 contributors.

Outstanding State Trustee Award: Quinn Stufflebeam of Title Financial Corporation. This award goes to the person who increased their state's

slightly, while the pace of sales also has slowed slightly. However, the inventory increases and/or slowdown in price increases necessary for a more widespread gain in sales are not forecasted to happen this year.

“While the situation is not getting worse for buyers, it’s also not improving notably in the majority of markets,” Hale said.

High-priced markets are a different story, according to Hale. Most of the inventory gains have been in upscale homes in high-growth markets, which suggests higher prices are incentivizing sellers.

Soft Home Sales Continue

After the best sales year in a decade in 2017, Hale said home sales are on track for a mild year-over-year decline in 2019, which is likely to extend throughout the year with a 2 percent decline.

“Although long-term desire to own a home remains strong, especially among younger Gen-Z and millennials, the market challenges that make owning a home difficult continue to keep out first-time buyers, locking them out not only of their home, but also of the wealth by equity generation that owning provides,” Hale said.

Millennials Purchase the Most Homes

Millennials will continue to make up the largest segment of buyers in 2019, accounting for 45 percent of mortgages, compared to 17 percent of Boomers and

37 percent of Gen Xers. While first-time buyers will struggle this year, older millennial move-up buyers will have more options in the mid- to upper-tier price point and will make up most millennials who close in 2019.

“Looking forward, 2020 is expected to be the peak millennial homebuying year with the largest cohort of millennials turning 30 years old,” Hale said. “Millennials are also likely to make up the largest share of homebuyers for the next decade as their housing needs adjust over time.”

Tax Plan Remains a Wild Card for Housing

In April 2019, taxpayers went through the income tax process for the first time since the new tax plan. For most renters, the results will be good: lower rates and a higher standard deduction should amount to lower tax bills. For homeowners, it’s a mixed bag.

“Some will benefit from lower rates and a higher standard deduction, but many others will find limited itemized deductions and personal exemptions mean a higher tax bill,” Hale said.

Despite the fact that 2017 home sales were the highest they’ve been in over a decade, sales in 2018 started to decline immediately following implementation of the tax plan. While many factors influence home sales, it could be the case that without homeownership incentives some renters are holding off on buying. “How the market will react in 2019 remains a wild card for housing,” Hale said. ■



Left to right: TIPAC co-chair Craig Haskins, ALTA President Cynthia Blair, Quinn Stufflebeam, ALTA TIPAC co-chair David Townsend and ALTA interim CEO Cornelia Horner.

contribution totals the most in 2018. From 2017 to 2018, this state went from \$4,625 (from nine contributors) to \$10,755 (from 15 contributors).

New Contributor Award: Tom Richardson of Liberty Title Agency received the award for the agent who brought in the most new contributors in

2018. Accepting the award was William Richardson, Tom’s son. In 2017, the company had three contributors, but tripled that number in 2018.



2019 ALTA ADVOCACY SUMMIT

To view more photos, go to [flickr.com/photos/altaonline](https://www.flickr.com/photos/altaonline)





How Have the 2017 Tax Law Changes Impacted Real Estate Prices?



By Odeta Kushi

Enacted in 2017, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act reduced tax breaks for homeowners. At the time, many in the real estate industry expected the changes to negatively impact the housing market, particularly in higher-priced neighborhoods. The industry concern primarily focused on two specific changes included in the bill: the mortgage interest deduction was limited to loans of \$750,000 or less, down from a previous cap of \$1 million, and the deduction for state and local (property) taxes was capped at \$10,000.

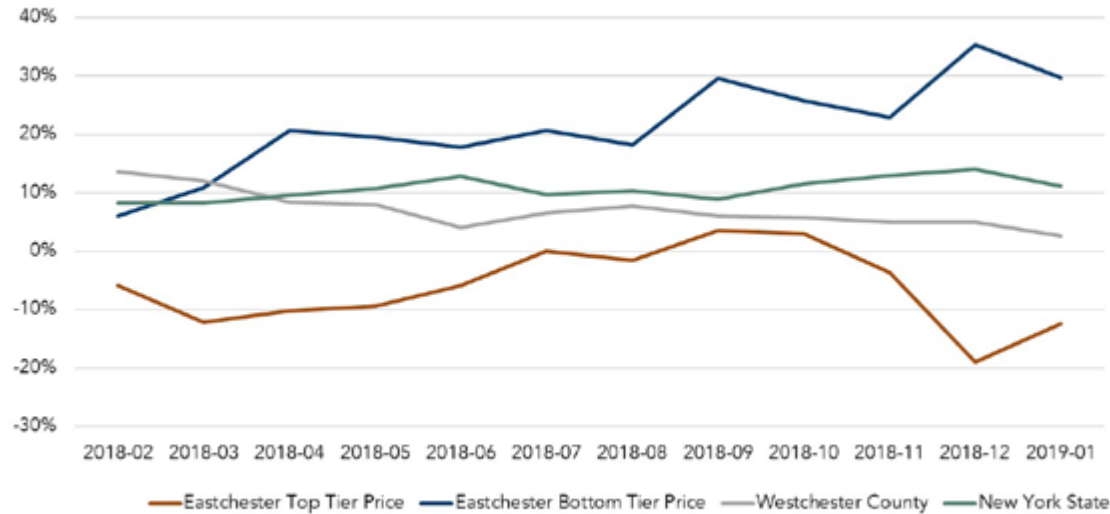
However, 16 months after the tax law took effect, the housing market remains healthy and it is difficult to find signs that the tax changes have impacted housing. Nationally, house prices have continued to rise. Median house prices have increased nearly 5 percent since the law was implemented, according to data from DataTree by First American. The limited deductibility of state and local taxes has not impacted the housing market nationally because the cap remains high enough, so most homeowners can still deduct all of their state and

local taxes.

So, at a macro-level, the tax changes have had virtually no impact to the housing market. However, zooming in on micro-markets, specifically high-priced markets where the high property prices result in property taxes that exceed the new cap on state and local tax deductions may find some impact. How far must we zoom in geographically to see an impact on house prices?

How Low Must We Go?

Year-over Year Change in List Price, %



Source: Zillow, First American Calculations, April 2018

Market Level: No Discernible Impact

Limiting deductions for state and local taxes, including property taxes, to \$10,000 per household was anticipated to hurt owners of expensive homes in high-tax states. However, states such as California, New York and Connecticut, that contain million-dollar-plus housing markets, have yet to see the anticipated impacts of the tax law. In fact, median sales prices for existing homes in these states were higher in 2018 after the tax law took effect than they were before the tax law took effect in 2017. Even in the high-cost metros, such as Los Angeles, Boston, New York, Seattle and Washington, D.C., median sale prices increased: 2.6 percent, 3.6 percent, 0.4 percent, 2.2 percent, and 3.9 percent respectively from January 2018 to January 2019. Indeed, we must get even more granular with our analysis to see any meaningful impact on housing from the tax law change.

County Level: Still No Impact

Our analysis found no signs of impact on housing at the national, state or metro level, but what if we focus on individual counties? Using the three counties with the highest property taxes in 2019: Westchester, Rockland and Nassau counties in New York, we find that median sale prices increased 1.6 percent, 0.6 percent, and 11.5 percent respectively in January 2019 compared with one year ago. On average in 2018, the pace of appreciation is similar to the house price appreciation in these counties in 2017 and 2016.

Town Level: Some Signs Emerge

Now, let's move to the town level. In Eastchester, a town in Westchester County, we find that homes in the bottom third of house prices increased 30 percent from

January 2018 through January 2019, according to Zillow data. In that same time period, the list price of homes in the highest-priced third of the market in Eastchester declined by 12.4 percent. This analysis aligns with what real estate professionals are seeing on the ground in high-priced markets, such as the Hamptons. It seems the tax law may have reduced demand at the highest price points of high-cost markets, causing prices to fall. So, only once we zoomed in to the town level did signs emerge of any impact from the tax law change.

Location, Location, Location

Our analysis found that the 2017 tax law only impacted house prices at the highest price points of high-cost towns. It's important to note that the 2018 housing market benefitted from a strong economy, record-low unemployment rates, and a tax cut that created more disposable income for consumers. However, the tax bill did raise the relative cost of owning versus renting in some high-cost markets.

It's difficult to discern whether these strong macro-economic trends may have masked the effects of the tax change on housing. What we know 16 months into the change is that the highest price points of some of the highest priced housing markets may suffer as real estate is re-priced to reflect the change in the cost of owning. It appears the old adage—location, location, location—also holds true when it comes to the effects of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.



ODETA KUSHI is deputy chief economist for First American Financial.



FinCEN Reissues Real Estate Geographic Targeting Orders for 12 Metros

ALTA Supports Bill to Update Anti-money Laundering Laws

The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) renewed its Geographic Targeting Orders (GTOs) that require U.S. title insurance companies to identify the natural persons behind shell companies used in all-cash purchases of residential real estate.

The purchase amount threshold remains \$300,000 for each covered metropolitan area. In addition, covered purchases using virtual currencies must be reported. The new GTOs run through Nov. 11.

According to FinCEN, GTOs continue to provide valuable data on the purchase of residential real estate by persons possibly involved in various illicit enterprises. Reissuing the GTOs will further assist in tracking illegal funds and other criminal or illicit activity, as well as inform FinCEN's future regulatory efforts in this sector. FinCEN says it appreciates the continued assistance and cooperation of the title insurance companies and ALTA in protecting the real estate markets from abuse by criminals.

The GTOs cover certain counties within the following major U.S. metropolitan areas:

- Boston
- Chicago
- Dallas-Fort Worth
- Honolulu
- Las Vegas
- Los Angeles
- Miami
- New York City
- San Antonio
- San Diego
- San Francisco
- Seattle

A currency transaction report must be filed with FinCEN if these things occur:

- Location (deal occurs in one of the areas included in the GTOs)
- All-cash deal (no financing)
- Purchase price exceeds \$300,000
- There's a corporate buyer
- Purchase price paid via monetary instrument, wire transfer or virtual currencies

The report must include:

- Information about the identity of the individual primarily responsible for representing the buyer. The title company must obtain a record of the individual's driver's license, passport or other similar identification
- Date of closing of the covered transaction
- Total amount transferred in the form of a monetary instrument
- Total purchase price of the covered transaction
- Address of real property involved

If the purchaser involved in the covered transaction is a limited liability company, the underwriter must provide the name, address and taxpayer identification number of all its members. Additionally, covered title companies must retain all records relating to compliance with the order for five years, store the records so they are accessible with a reasonable period of time and make the data available to FinCEN or other law enforcement or regulatory agencies, upon request. Under the Bank Secrecy Act, covered businesses must retain all records relating to compliance with the GTOs for at least five years from the last day that the GTOs are effective (including any renewals).

States do not require companies to disclose their beneficial owners at the time of creation. This reduces the value of financial intelligence provided by banks, title insurance companies and other financial institutions under their anti-money laundering laws (AML) and GTO obligations. A single national repository, operated by law enforcement, would ensure FinCEN obtains valuable information about anonymous shell companies from the sources with the best knowledge.

ALTA believes Congress should include a corporate beneficial ownership registry at a federal or state level to help law enforcement combat the abuse of LLCs to hide beneficial ownership in real estate transactions.

Tools to Help

■ Access resources to help your company comply at alta.org/fincen

■ Email questions to FinCEN at FRC@FinCEN.gov

Federal Changes?

On May 9, the Financial Services Committee voted 50-0 to advance HR 2514, the "Coordinating Oversight, Upgrading and Innovating Technology, and Examiner Reform Act of 2019." The bipartisan legislation updates the federal AML to close loopholes, increase penalties and provide new tools and reduce the reporting burden for financial institutions.

The bill was the subject of a hearing in March. At that time, a discussion draft included a provision to expand the FinCEN GTOs to cover commercial real estate transactions on the same terms as residential transactions (e.g. cash purchases over \$300,000). Also included was a provision to affirmatively cover transactions made using a like-kind exchange.

Following the release of the discussion draft, ALTA met with the staff of the House Financial Services Committee (HFSC) to provide industry views on the GTOs. In that meeting, ALTA expressed concerns that just adding commercial real estate into the existing GTOs would be ineffective since it would leave significant loopholes and increase the burden on the industry.

Following the meeting, ALTA staff provided suggested edits to the language to require FinCEN to issue a unique GTO on commercial real estate. While committee staff expressed support for the changes, the draft of the bill introduced for last week's mark-up did not include them.

ALTA members were able to get a last-minute meeting with bill sponsor Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.). During this meeting, ALTA Board Governor David Townsend NTP, ALTA member Cheryl Cowherd NTP and Missouri Land Title Association First Vice President Mark Foglesong pressed the need for these changes and learned that they would be included in an amendment.

During the ALTA Advocacy Summit, attendees asked for support of HR 2513, which would require LLCs to file reports with FinCEN on their beneficial ownership at the time the business structure is created. These reports would be private, but accessible to law enforcement and title companies (with customer permission). ALTA supports this legislation to ease the burden on title companies reporting cash transactions under the GTOs.

This bill was slated to be voted on by the HFSC on the day ALTA Advocacy Summit attendees were on Capitol Hill. Prior to this, there were reports that it would pass the committee with all the Democrats and a handful of Republicans voting for the bill. However, after ALTA members discussed the bill on May 8, the vote was postponed to allow time to negotiate some changes to garner more Republican support. If the bill passes with overwhelming bipartisan support, it will be due to the outreach of ALTA members on Capitol Hill Day.

Marijuana and the Title Industry

By Steve Tjaden

Proposed Changes at Federal Level Could Close Gap With Various State Laws

What to Consider When Handling Transactions Involving Marijuana Money



CANNABIS IS STILL VERY MUCH IN THE NEWS. Thirty-three states across the U.S. have adopted some level of legalization of marijuana, and 10 of those plus the District of Columbia have fully adopted it for recreational use. With so many states legalizing marijuana at some level, where is the title industry on this topic?

To answer that question, it's necessary to examine federal law as it pertains to the handling of a transaction that may involve a marijuana farm or marijuana dispensary. These areas include: the Controlled Substances Act, the Money Laundering Control Act, and civil and criminal forfeiture laws.

Controlled Substances Act

Under the Controlled Substance Act, marijuana is defined as a Schedule 1 drug. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, examples of Schedule 1 drugs include heroin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), marijuana (cannabis), methylenedioxyamphetamine (ecstasy), methaqualone and peyote. Any person or entity by association that violates the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. § 841(a) – 21 U.S.C. § 846) is subject to some hefty penalties:

- 10 years to life for possession
- 20 years to life if death or serious bodily injury results from use
- Up to \$10,000 (individual) or \$50,000 (party)

Money Laundering Control Act

There are also concerns for title insurance agents and companies under the Money Laundering Control Act. Under this law, any entity knowingly or unknowingly involved in handling or settling financial transactions for marijuana-related businesses could be considered complicit in “unlawful activity” (violating of the Controlled Substance Act), and subject to the following penalties:

- Up to \$500,000, or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction (whichever is greater)
- Up to 20 years in prison, or
- Both

Forfeiture laws

Title agents and companies also need to be aware of the risks of insuring and transferring real property that is associated with unlawful activity. Such property may be subject to civil and criminal forfeiture and guilty parties may be subject to the penalties.

Change on the Horizon

With all that in mind, what has been going on at a federal level to help close the gap between federal law and various state laws?

One recent approach was the introduction of the Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States (STATES) Act. The Tenth Amendment, which protects state rights, reads:

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”

The STATES Act was meant to allow states to adopt their own

laws associated with marijuana and not run afoul of the federal laws outlined above. It died in Congress late last year, but was reintroduced in the 116th U.S. Congress on April 4, 2019.

Today, there are several other federal proposals in the wind. One proposed bill is HR 420. This proposal attempts to regulate marijuana in the same way alcohol is regulated today. You may be thinking, “Does this really have a chance of passing?” It's hard to tell.

Some “lift” has been provided in this area with the passing of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (also known as the Farm Bill), which was signed into law by the president last year.

Under prior law, the production of hemp (a type of cannabis) was treated the same as producing Schedule 1 drugs like heroin. Unlike other types of cannabis, hemp is distinguished by its lower concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which under the Farm Bill, is defined as a concentration of no more than 0.3 percent THC on a dry weight basis. Under the new law, everything changed for production of hemp. These changes require:

- Land that is being used to grow hemp must be registered for a period of three years.
 - The hemp, or hemp product, must be tested annually to make sure that the levels of THC are at .3% or lower.
 - There must be a procedure to dispose of hemp product that violates the law.
- Negligent violations of the Farm Bill are not a crime, but do come with repercussions:
- Producers will be given a date to correct the violation.
 - A requirement for periodic reports on compliance for at least two years.
 - Repeat negligent violations (three times) will be prohibited from producing hemp for five years.

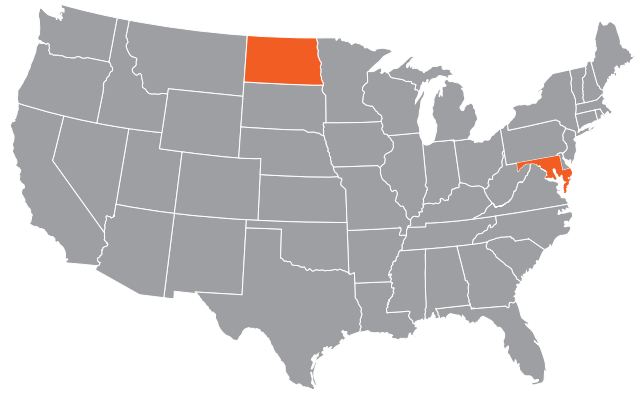
If violations of the Farm Bill are deemed above and beyond negligence, the producer will be reported to the attorney general and the chief law enforcement officer of the state.

In summary, each title company will need to carefully weigh all the risks before making a determination on whether to handle hemp transactions. How the industry looks at the handling of marijuana-related transactions is one that has a myriad of risks associated. The industry will carefully monitor federal legislation that may ultimately reduce the risk.

ALTA supports efforts to clarify compliance under state and federal laws for businesses that facilitate the sale of real estate that could be used in growing, storing or selling of marijuana.

STEVE TJADEN is senior vice president and operations advisor for Old Republic National Title Insurance Company. He also is a member of ALTA's Marijuana Work Group.

Maryland, North Dakota Governors Sign RON Bills



18 States Have Passed Remote Online Notarization Legislation

NORTH DAKOTA GOV. DOUG BURGUM RECENTLY SIGNED HOUSE BILL 1110 INTO LAW

enabling remote online notarizations (RON) in the state. Meanwhile, Gov. Larry Hogan recently signed Senate Bill 678 into law enabling RON in Maryland. In April, Maryland's legislature passed its bill, which modifies the state's Uniform Law on Notarial Acts and allows for remote online notarization for real estate transactions.

Maryland's bill was sponsored by Sen. J.B. Jennings. The legislation will go into effect Oct. 1, 2020. The delay gives the Secretary of State time to promulgate regulations, and develop testing for new notarial applicants, as well as a course of study for new applicants and those seeking to renew their commission and approve third-party education providers.

North Dakota's bill revises the state's Uniform Law on Notarial Acts (RULONA), and goes into effect Aug. 1, 2019. The Secretary of State must promulgate rules before remote online transactions can be performed in the state.

Maryland and North Dakota join 16 other states that recognize some form of RON. These include Arizona, Indiana, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia

and Washington.

"This was the fourth year in a row that the legislature had a notary bill before it," said Bill O'Connell, president of the Maryland Land Title Association. "The passage by the legislature this year could not have happened without the support and input of many, and especially not without the leadership of Senator J.B. Jennings."

Maryland



Pictured, Back Row (l-r): Bill Pitcher, Maryland Land Title Association; Caitlin McDonough, Harris Jones & Malone LLC; Sen. J.B. Jennings (bill sponsor); Bill O'Connell, First American Title; Bill Castelli, Maryland Association of Realtors; Merry Tobin, RE/MAX; Jamie Gregory, Calfee Strategic Solutions; Michael O'Neal, First American Title; and Boyd Campbell, Century 21 New Millennium. **Front Row (l-r):** Sen. Mike Miller, president of the Senate; Gov. Larry Hogan; and Del. Adrienne A. Jones, speaker of the House of Delegates. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Executive Office of the Governor. This image has been modified to fit this post and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

North Dakota



Pictured, Front Row (l-r): Secretary of State Al Jaeger, Gov. Gov. Doug Burgum and House Speaker Larry Klemin; **Back Row:** Parrell Krossman of the Consumer Protection Division of the North Dakota Attorney General's Office; Nick Hacker, president of North Dakota Guaranty & Title; and Judge Gail Hagerty; **Not pictured is** Michael O'Neal of First American Title Insurance Co.

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**Want a stand-out strategy for being an eClosing leader?
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2019 First-quarter Results

Title Order Counts Start to Slow Down



Fidelity

Fidelity National Financial reported that its title segment generated \$172.0 million in pre-tax income during the first quarter of 2019. This compared to \$186.0 million in pre-tax income during the first quarter of 2018.

“The first quarter was a strong start to the year for our title business,” said Bill Foley, chair of Fidelity National Financial. “We remain optimistic that the strong economy, stable or declining mortgage rates, slower home price appreciation and the possibility of increased residential supply will also provide the backdrop for a restart of the strength in the residential purchase market as we move into the seasonally stronger spring and summer months.”

During the first quarter of 2019, Fidelity’s direct operations opened 7,200 orders per day and closed

4,300 per day. This compared to 7,700 opened orders and 5,000 closed orders during the same period a year ago.

Fidelity reported that the recent decline in mortgage rates resulted in an increase in refinance open order counts. March refinance orders opened increased 16 percent compared to March 2018. The first three weeks of April experienced a 42 percent increase over the prior year period. Also, while first quarter purchase orders opened declined by 6 percent versus the first quarter of 2018, the first three weeks of April saw a decline of only 2 percent versus the prior year period. Fidelity didn’t report any claims paid during the second quarter of 2019. According to the earnings release, the company paid \$51 million in claims during the same period in 2018.

Regarding its pending acquisition of Stewart

Information Services, Fidelity continues to respond to a second request from the Federal Trade Commission. Fidelity also has filed a new Form A application with the New York State Department of Financial Services (NYSDFS), which rejected the initial application to acquire New York-domiciled Stewart Title Insurance Company.

During the company's earnings call, Fidelity Chief Financial Officer Tony Park said merger and acquisition activity will "always be a big part of our legacy, whether it's a Stewart acquisition or whether it's other opportunities in the title insurance space, agents, larger agents or smaller underwriters or maybe other areas in the real estate related space."

First American

First American Financial reported that its title insurance segment posted pre-tax earnings of \$142.0 million during the first quarter of 2019.

This compared to \$102.4 million of pre-tax earnings during the same period a year ago.

"The company performed well in the first quarter despite ongoing challenges in the housing market that began in the second half of last year," said Dennis Gilmore, chief executive officer at First American Financial. "Our strong performance was driven by effective expense management and growth in our investment income that helped us achieve a 12.1 percent pretax title margin."

During the first quarter, First American's direct operations opened 3,734 orders per day and closed 2,474 per day. This compares to 4,089 direct orders opened per day during the same period in 2018 and 2,800 orders closed per day. On the commercial side, First American opened 491 orders and closed 271 during the first quarter of 2019.

"As we've entered the spring selling season, we're becoming more optimistic about the housing market given the positive economic backdrop and the recent decline in mortgage rates," Gilmore said. "Importantly, we are encouraged by April's open order trend, with purchase orders down 2 percent and refinance up 29 percent compared with last year, which is an improvement over the past three quarters. In addition, we expect continued strong performance in our commercial business."

First American paid \$40.8 million in claims during the first quarter of 2019. This is up from \$36.6 million in claims paid during the same period a year ago. The provision for policy losses and other claims was \$36.2 million in the first quarter, or 4 percent of title premiums and escrow fees, compared with a 4 percent loss provision rate in the first quarter of 2018. The current quarter rate reflects an ultimate loss rate of 4

percent for the current policy year and no change in the loss reserve estimates for prior policy years.

Stewart

Stewart Information Services reported that its title segment posted a pre-tax loss of \$400,000 during the first quarter of 2019. This compared to pre-tax income of \$5.1 million during the first quarter of 2018.

During the latest quarter, Stewart opened 82,260 direct orders and closed 51,061 orders. This compared to 90,075 direct orders opened and 60,070 orders closed during Q1 2018. The company reported it paid \$15.7 million in claims during the first quarter. This is down from roughly \$19.0 million in claims paid during the first quarter of 2018.

Title operating revenues in the first quarter of 2019 decreased compared to the prior year quarter as direct title and independent agency revenues decreased 13 percent and 9 percent, respectively. The segment's overall operating expenses in the first quarter of 2019 declined \$35.5 million compared to the prior year quarter, as combined employee and other operating costs decreased 7 percent and title loss expense decreased 17 percent.

With respect to Fidelity National Financial's pending acquisition of Stewart, the companies are responding to the Federal Trade Commission's second request. Fidelity also filed a new Form A application with the New York State Department of Financial Services, which rejected the prior application to acquire New York-domiciled Stewart Title Insurance Company.

"In addition to preparing for the spring selling season, we continue to work through the ongoing regulatory approval process for our merger with Fidelity National," said Matthew Morris, Stewart's chief executive officer. "I remain thankful for the support and professionalism of our associates during the transaction process."

Old Republic

Old Republic International reported that its title segment generated \$20.5 million in pre-tax income during the first quarter of 2018. This compared to \$29.5 million in pre-tax income during the same period in 2018.

The company said year-over-year comparisons of revenues from title premiums and fees reflect a mild slowdown in housing and mortgage lending activity. In contrast, claim costs trended higher as favorable development of prior years' claim reserve estimates edged down. Old Republic paid \$14.4 million in claims during the latest quarter, up from \$12.9 million in claims paid during the first quarter of 2018.



MERS Owner Doubles Down on Digital Mortgages

Intercontinental Exchange (ICE), an operator of global exchanges and clearing houses and provider of data and listings services, has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Simplifile for \$335 million.

The transaction is expected to close in the third quarter of this year, subject to the expiration or termination of the applicable waiting period under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act of 1976. Upon closing, Simplifile, which has approximately 200 employees, will continue to be based in Provo, Utah, and operate under the Simplifile name.

In 2018, ICE completed its purchase of MERSCORP Holdings, which is the owner of Mortgage Electronic Registrations Systems (MERS). MERS is a national electronic registry that tracks the changes in servicing rights and beneficial ownership interests in U.S.-based mortgages.

“Originators, consumers and investors can obtain significant benefits and savings as the real estate process shifts from paper-based to digital transactions. Simplifile understood this trend early, uniquely solving for the critical aspect of submitting required documents into the public record in a seamless,

auditable and transparent method,” said Chris McEntee, president of ICE Mortgage Services. “By connecting lenders, settlement agents and counties through a robust network, Simplifile will enhance ICE’s efforts to further streamline a legacy process ripe for innovation.”

Simplifile operates one of the largest networks connecting the agents and jurisdictions that underpin residential mortgage records, serving as an electronic liaison between lenders, settlement agents and county recording offices, streamlining the local recording of residential mortgage transactions.

As a pioneer in helping its customers submit electronic documents into the public record, ICE Mortgage Services significantly expands its portfolio through the Simplifile acquisition. Simplifile and MERS support the residential lending industry’s shift to digitization and will, together, help to make the mortgage closing process simpler, faster and more transparent for a range of industry stakeholders.

Simplifile was founded in 2000 and now provides electronic recording in 1,922 U.S. counties, representing over 80 percent of the population.

Florida Agency Network and Total Title Solutions Join Forces

Florida Agency Network (FAN) is joining forces with Total Title Solutions (TTS) to expand each organization's footprint into key Florida markets. Abe Moussa launched TTS in 2009.

"As a team, we are excited about the services and products that FAN has to offer," said Angie Haddon, chief operating officer of TTS. "We all believe that the TTS way is already above and beyond the standards of the title industry. However, the merger with FAN will make a superior experience. Anyone involved in the real estate transaction will continue to be in great hands."

FAN will take control of TTS'

operations. Angie Haddon will become a division manager for FAN, while Lisa Jahr will be promoted to regional manager and will oversee offices throughout the Tampa Bay area. The merger will add five new locations for FAN, which include two in Pinellas County, two in Pasco County and one in Hernando County.

Visionet Unveils Tool to Automate Bulk Title Searches

Visionet Systems launched a proprietary digitized title research and collation (D-TRAC) solution to automate bulk title search requirements. D-TRAC enables the company to access more than 2,000 counties digitally to perform searches. The system directs users to the right

data source automatically, expediting turnaround time at least 30 percent. In a release, Visionet claimed to have the fastest turn time for bulk searches.

CATIC Offers PrepExpress Online Software in Florida

CATIC's proprietary software PrepExpress Online (PE Online) is now available for Florida transactions. The customized closing tool was developed by CATIC's IT staff with input from the paralegals, attorneys and title agents who use the software every day. PE Online streamlines the preparation of policies, while automating the calculation of tax adjustments, recording fees, conveyance and transfer taxes and disbursements.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR CLOSING, TITLE AND ESCROW SOFTWARE?

When searching for a new provider, you need to make sure to evaluate everything a company has to offer, not just its sale pitch. Here is a checklist of seven questions you should use when searching for the best vendor for you and your company.

Here's **7** things to consider before purchasing title software.

- 1** What are the included features/integration possibilities?
- 2** How does the company harness the power of automation?
- 3** Is the company dedicated to the protection of you and your customers' data?
- 4** Is the company more than just a software supplier?
- 5** Can you test the product first?
- 6** Is the company reputable?
- 7** Is the software a good value?

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Other features include the creation of closing protection letters, the export of disbursement data, and the preparation of 1099-S forms, the Closing Disclosure and the HUD-1.

REASI Unveils Blockchain App to Improve Escrow Process

REASI has introduced a blockchain-based application to digitize the traditional escrow process and help eliminate many of the inefficiencies and vulnerabilities of an important phase in the traditional real estate transaction. REASI is a mobile, cloud-based application that enables real estate brokers to close home transactions from their smartphones or tablets. Vendors and customers collaborate in real time using a secure workspace where closing documents and client escrow deposits are integrated.

Recent Integrations

- **RynohLive** has partnered with legal software provider **Easysoft**. The partnership between the two software companies provides a new solution enhancement for Easysoft’s attorney, legal professional and title agent clients nationwide, enabling access to RynohLive’s escrow and financial security tools under a single platform.
- **Qualia** announced a new fee collaboration enhancement to its integration with **Ellie Mae’s** Encompass digital mortgage solution. The fee collaboration allows mortgage lenders to provide more accurate fee information to consumers and enables title companies to disburse matched fees in a more timely manner.
- **SafeChain** has integrated its wire fraud prevention software, **SafeWire**, with **Adeptive’s** title and production software, **ResWare**. SafeWire protects real estate wire transactions by verifying the identity of both the buyer and seller and authenticating ownership of the accounts involved in the transaction.

Housing Market Potential

Existing and Potential Home Sales* (in Millions, Seasonally Adjusted Annualized Rate)

5.48 SAAR

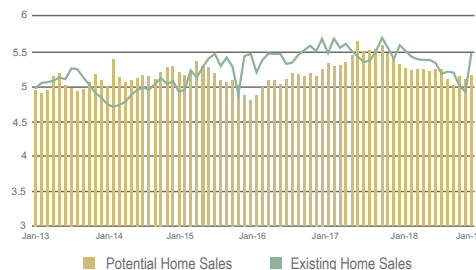
Existing Home Sales

5.16 SAAR

Potential Home Sales

+6.1%

Market Performance Gap



*Potential home sales measures what a healthy market level of home sales should be based on the economic, demographic and housing market environments.

National Consumer House-Buying Power

How much home one can afford to buy given the average income and the prevailing mortgage rate

February 2019

\$377,913

House-Buying Power

+2.4%

Year-Over-Year

Where House-Buying Power is Strongest

Top States and Cities

States

1. New Jersey: **\$507,964**
2. Maryland: **\$487,842**
3. Connecticut: **\$482,296**
4. Hawaii: **\$475,680**
5. Massachusetts: **\$474,464**

Cities

1. San Jose, CA: **\$721,999**
2. San Francisco, CA: **\$652,797**
3. Washington, DC: **\$631,776**
4. Boston, MA: **\$541,999**
5. Seattle, WA: **\$531,511**

Source: Mark Fleming, Chief Economist at First American Financial Corporation

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NTP PROFILE



Debra Bartlett NTP

COMPANY: Corporate Settlement Solutions (CSS)
TITLE: Executive Vice President of Operations
CITY/STATE: Charlevoix, Mich.
DATE OF DESIGNATION: 2017
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: 36 years

NTP Takes Career to ‘Next Level’

Why did you become an NTP?

I am always looking to further my career and take it to the “next level.” After serving as chair of our Michigan Professional Designation program and achieving my state designation, it seemed like a natural next step.

How have you used the NTP designation to advance your career or promote your business?

The designation can be used on business cards, social media, email signatures, marketing materials, etc., and is very well respected by all.

How does being an NTP advance your career?

The national designation helps me promote the fact that we have a multi-state business model.

How did you get into the industry?

I applied for a job as a paralegal with an attorney who owned a title company at a time when the concept of insured closings was first being introduced. I was fortunate to be able to learn every aspect of the industry from commercial, construction and residential closings, to title examination and eventually excelling into management and then the operations level.

How has the industry evolved since you began your career?

There have been more changes in the last five or six years than in the previous 30. It’s all about thinking outside the box, and offering innovation and convenience through the use of technology.

What advice do you have for professionals starting in their career in the industry?

Be open to new ideas. Do not get stuck in a mindset that there is only one way to achieve a task. Engage in the industry and learn all you can. You can start by participating in your local and state organizations and then the national level. The rewards will be many and you will get to know some very interesting people along the way.

Who has been your professional mentor and why?

Jerome Jelinek—our CEO. He has always led our company as a very forward thinker and has taught me that you can only achieve by formulating a plan and trying—and adapting to change quickly.

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Tischler

Old Republic Appoints SVP of Technology Solutions

Old Republic National Title Insurance Company announced it has named Jeffrey A. Tischler as senior vice president of technology solutions. In this role, Tischler will oversee the delivery of quality, stand-alone digital products and solutions, while focusing on integration initiatives that support Old Republic

Title's overall digital strategy. He has leadership responsibilities for Pavaso and RamQuest. The majority of Tischler's career has been in financial and strategic leadership in the financial services and financial technology sectors. He successfully led and managed a variety of companies as a C-level executive for more than 25 years.

First National Title Names Underwriting Counsel

First National Title Insurance Company (FNTI) announced it has named William "Chance" Perkins as underwriting counsel. In this role, Perkins will offer expertise on residential and commercial transactions, and help educate FNTI title agents as well as their clients in the real estate industry. He has spent time as an examining attorney with two title companies in Texas and most recently worked as Texas underwriting counsel for a title underwriter.

Title Alliance Appoints General Counsel, Compliance Officer

Title Alliance recently appointed Maria Deligiorgis as general counsel and compliance officer. In this position, she is responsible for all of the company's legal and business elements in all operations. Deligiorgis will focus on overseeing the business and legal practices of Title Alliance and all its entities, in all operations in all states. Deligiorgis also supervises and directs underwriting, compliance reports and best practices along with overseeing SOC 1 and SOC 2 reporting and other compliance endeavors.

Thomas Title & Escrow Names SVP for Dallas Market

Thomas Title & Escrow announced it has hired Anne M. Miller as senior vice president where she will head up operations in the Dallas market. An industry veteran of 40 years in title and banking, Miller will be responsible for optimizing workflow processes, technology platforms and regulatory compliance through training and review of benchmark performance standards. Prior to joining Thomas, she spent nearly two decades with a large Texas title company where she worked with more than 500 employees.

NATIC Names Underwriting Counsel and State Manager in Florida

North American Title Insurance Co. (NATIC) named Jessica Hew as underwriting counsel and state agency manager in Florida. In this hybrid role, Hew has become part of Florida's underwriting counsel team, bringing commercial and real estate law practice experience to her work with NATIC agents. She also will help oversee agency operations in Florida and expand NATIC's attorney agent base in the state. Hew, a member of the Florida Bar for more than 25 years, previously worked nearly 20 years at Burr & Forman LLP.

Agents National Title Names Florida Business Development Manager

Incenter LLC announced that 25-year industry veteran Kristy Weller-Johnson will join Agents National Title as its Florida business development manager. Weller-Johnson will work to cultivate agency relationships and build an agency base in South Florida. Prior to joining Agents National Title, Weller-Johnson spent eight years as the statewide client relations and business development manager for One-Step Lien Search LLC.

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Consumer Education Is in Our Hands

JUNE IS NATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP MONTH! As it has in past years, ALTA launched a digital marketing campaign on Facebook and Google to raise awareness about the benefits of title insurance.



CYNTHIA DURHAM BLAIR NTP
ALTA president

ALTA targeted markets by culling a list that identified metros in 2019 that are favorable to first-time homebuyers and cities where the share of millennial homeownership increased the most from 2016 to 2017. Cities where we plan to market include Birmingham, Ala.; Virginia Beach, Va.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Buffalo, N.Y.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Columbus, Ohio; Seattle, Wash.; Nashville, Tenn.; Tampa, Fla. and Houston, Texas.

To help ALTA members educate market to consumers during homeownership month, the association created a simple page that gives members instant access to the eight most popular items available. All items are member-only, except for the wire fraud rack card, which is available to anyone to help raise awareness about this crime. These resources are available at alta.org/homeownershipmonth.

In addition to the online advertising, ALTA is close to wrapping up editing of a segment that will air on PBS' Spotlight called "Protecting Property Rights."

The PBS crew came to my office and interviewed me, as well as lender and Realtor in the Columbia, S.C., market. The roughly five-minute segment opens with various types of homes and families, capturing the emotion of owning a home. The piece then highlights title issues, such as undisclosed liens and judgments, that the new homeowner could be responsible for, reinforcing the need for title insurance. We expect the segment to air during the summer.

Finally, on the education front, I gave a webinar titled "Avoiding Wire Fraud in the Mortgage Closing Process" for the CFPB. The audience was financial advisors who regularly work with consumers. This webinar was a fantastic opportunity to help these financial advisors educate their clients and consumers about one of the greatest threats to our industry. In this presentation, I explained how these schemes are carried out in the mortgage closing process. I also discussed recently reported frauds, provided examples of fraudulent emails and shared red flags to help spot fraudulent emails. I also provided best practices for consumers to protect their money and advice for what to do if they've been targeted by such a scam.

All of us should take advantage of opportunities to help equip consumers with knowledge so they can make educated decisions when buying or selling a home. It's the perfect opportunity to lead, deliver and protect.



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