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Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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1-31-1972

## **Excerpts from Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Tax Reform in St. Petersburg Florida**

Edmund S. Muskie

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FOR RELEASE MONDAY 9:00 A.M.

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JANUARY 31, 1972

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EXCERPTS FROM REMARKS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

BREAKFAST MEETING -- ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA -- JAN. 31, 1972

I AM HERE TODAY BECAUSE FLORIDA HAS A SPECIAL IMPORTANCE  
IN THE POLITICS OF 1972.

FOR YEARS, YOUR STATE STOOD ON THE SIDELINES WHILE  
OTHER STATES TESTED THE CANDIDATES AND THE ISSUES. NOW YOU  
ARE NO LONGER BYSTANDERS. YOU ARE NO LONGER SPECTATORS.  
YOU ARE IN THE CENTER OF THE ACTION, AND THAT IS WHERE YOU  
SHOULD BE.

THE PROBLEMS OF 1972 ARE AS FAR AWAY AS SOUTHEAST  
ASIA AND AS NEAR AS THE EVERGLADES. THEY ARE PROBLEMS FOR  
ALL OF US . . . NOT FOR YOUR STATE ALONE . . . NOT FOR THE  
SOUTH ALONE . . . BUT FOR EVERY CITIZEN OF EVERY REGION.

*Sen. Clinton*

AMERICA'S ~~AGED~~ HAVE A SPECIAL STAKE IN THE FLORIDA  
PRIMARY . . . NOT JUST THOSE WHO LIVE IN TAMPA AND ST. PETERSBURG. . .  
BUT OLDER AMERICANS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, FROM PHILADELPHIA  
TO SALT LAKE CITY.

THEY ALL KNOW THE FEELING OF LIVING IN A LAND WHERE  
AGE TOO OFTEN BUILDS BARRIERS AND IMPOSES LONELINESS.

AND THEY ALL SEE WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE OLD IN A  
COUNTRY WHERE EVERYONE ELSE WANTS TO BE YOUNG . . .

-- TO LIVE WITH FALLING INCOMES IN A TIME OF INFLATION . . .

-- TO LIVE WITH FAILING HEALTH IN A TIME OF RISING  
MEDICAL COSTS . . .

-- AND TO LIVE WITH STAGGERING PROPERTY TAXES IN A  
TIME WHEN HOME IS OFTEN ALL THERE IS TO HOLD ON TO.

YOU HAVE A VOTE IN THE FLORIDA PRIMARY. YOU CAN  
VOTE TO ASSURE A DECENT LIFE FOR OLDER AMERICANS. YOU CAN  
DO THAT FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS IN ST. PETERSBURG . . . AND FOR  
MILLIONS OF OLDER AMERICANS IN OTHER STATES WHO ARE WAITING  
FOR HELP AND WATCHING THIS CAMPAIGN.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO RELIEVE THE TERRIBLE  
BURDEN OF PROPERTY TAXES ON THE ELDERLY . . . TAXES THAT ARE  
PRICING THEM OUT OF THE HOMES AND NEIGHBORHOODS THEY BUILT,  
OFTEN WITH THEIR OWN HANDS.

A NATIONAL NEWS MAGAZINE RECENTLY REPORTED ON THE SADLY  
TYPICAL PLIGHT OF A CALIFORNIA WOMAN IN HER SEVENTIES. SHE  
NOW PAYS MORE IN PROPERTY TAXES EVERY YEAR THAN SHE PAID TO  
BUY HER HOUSE THIRTY YEARS AGO. SHE MAY SOON BE FORCED TO  
SELL, AS THOUSANDS OF OTHERS ALREADY HAVE. SHE HAS THE  
RIGHT TO SOMETHING BETTER THAN EVICTION AND HOMELESSNESS AT  
THE AGE OF SEVENTY-TWO. SHE DESERVES THE BEST USE OF YOUR  
VOTE IN THE PRIMARY THIS MARCH.

YOU CAN VOTE THEN FOR A PROGRAM WHICH I AM PROPOSING  
TODAY . . . TO PROVIDE PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR THE AGED IN  
THE FORM OF A HOUSING SECURITY SYSTEM. UNDER THIS SYSTEM,  
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL SPEND A BILLION DOLLARS TO <sup>HELP</sup> PAY  
THE HOUSING COSTS THAT OLDER AMERICANS CANNOT PAY FOR THEMSELVES.  
LIKE SOCIAL SECURITY, HOUSING SECURITY WILL MEAN REGULAR  
MONTHLY PAYMENTS TO THOSE IN NEED. WHATEVER THE BURDEN ON  
THE ELDERLY, WHETHER RENTS OR MORTGAGES OR PROPERTY TAXES,  
THIS NATION HAS A DUTY TO GUARANTEE THEM A DECENT HOME . . .  
SO THEY CAN LIVE OUT THEIR LIVES IN PEACE AND DIGNITY. AND  
THAT IS WHY I AM ASKING FLORIDA TO VOTE NOT ONLY FOR ME AS  
A CANDIDATE . . . BUT FOR A COMMITMENT TO THIS BILLION-DOLLAR  
HOUSING SECURITY SYSTEM.

MOST AMERICANS FEEL THE PRESSURES OF INFLATION.  
MOST AMERICANS FEEL THE COST OF MEDICAL CARE. AND MOST  
AMERICANS FEEL THE TERRIBLE BURDEN OF PROPERTY TAXES.

THE VOTERS OF PINELLAS COUNTY, YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE, ARE ALREADY IN REVOLT. NOT ONLY HAVE THEY REFUSED TO SUPPORT INCREASED PROPERTY TAXES, BUT THEY ARE VOTING TO REDUCE THEM. AND PEOPLE HERE ARE NOT ALONE. THEY ARE TYPICAL OF TAXPAYERS, SOUTH AND NORTH ALIKE, WHO ARE BEING DRIVEN OUT OF THEIR HOMES OR INTO DEBT.

WE MUST BRING RELIEF AND REFORM TO OUR PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM.

WE CANNOT DO THAT IF WE CONTINUE TO THROW AWAY FEDERAL RESOURCES ON TAX CUTS THAT AID CORPORATIONS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CONSUMER. AND WE SHOULD NOT DO THAT WITH A NATIONAL SALES TAX, WHICH THE WHITE HOUSE IS CONSIDERING, A TAX THAT WILL MAKE YOU PAY MORE MONEY EVERY DAY SO THAT YOU CAN PAY A LITTLE LESS MONEY AT THE END OF THE YEAR.

THE FIRST KEY TO LOCAL PROPERTY TAX RELIEF IS FEDERAL TAX REFORM. WE MUST CLOSE THE LOOPHOLES THAT LET MILLIONAIRES PAY LESS THAN THEIR SECRETARIES . . . AND WE MUST USE SOME OF THE SAVINGS TO REDUCE SOME OF THE TAXES ON OUR HOMES.

THE SECOND KEY TO PROPERTY TAX RELIEF IS STATE AND LOCAL TAX REFORM. WASHINGTON MUST ENCOURAGE THE STATES AND LOCALITIES TO REPLACE REGRESSIVE PROPERTY TAXES WITH A SOUND AND PROGRESSIVE SYSTEM. FOR EXAMPLE, MY REVENUE SHARING BILL ALREADY CALLS FOR BONUS PAYMENTS TO STATES WHICH MOVE TOWARD THAT GOAL. AND WE MUST MOVE AS FAR AND AS FAST AS WE CAN . . . TOWARD THE DAY WHEN OUR SCHOOLS NO LONGER DEPEND ON EVER HEAVIER TAXES ON OUR PROPERTY.

THE POWER OF WASHINGTON CAN INTERFERE UNFAIRLY  
WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT. BUT IT CAN ALSO MAKE LOCAL TAXES  
FAIR. AND THAT IS SOMETHING FLORIDA CAN PROUDLY VOTE FOR  
IN MARCH OF 1972.

*OF COURSE*

~~OF COURSE~~, IT WILL <sup>^</sup>TAKE TIME TO REPLACE THE PROPERTY  
TAX. IN THE MEANTIME, WE CAN AT LEAST DEMAND A SYSTEM OPEN  
TO EVERYONE, PARTIAL TO NO ONE.

THOUSANDS OF BUILDINGS IN THIS COUNTRY -- ESPECIALLY  
THOSE OWNED BY WEALTHY PRIVATE INTERESTS -- ARE ASSESSED AT  
ESPECIALLY LOW VALUES. TOO OFTEN, AVERAGE HOMEOWNERS ARE  
PAYING MORE PROPERTY TAXES THAN THEY SHOULD, WHILE THE  
INFLUENTIAL ARE EVADING THEIR FAIR SHARE.

AMERICA'S PROPERTY TAXES ARE INEFFICIENT, INEQUITABLE,  
AND INTOLERABLE. ASSESSMENTS ARE USUALLY MADE IN SECRET --  
AND THEY USUALLY FAVOR THE POWERFUL FEW. WHY SHOULD YOU  
BEAR THE BURDEN WHILE OTHERS ESCAPE THEIR DUTY? WHY SHOULD  
THEY PAY SO LITTLE WHILE HOSPITALS AND POLICE FORCES --  
AND POLLUTION PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS -- ARE IN DEEP  
FINANCIAL TROUBLE?

YOU CAN ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS IN THE FLORIDA PRIMARY.

YOU CAN VOTE FOR AN OPEN PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM.

YOU CAN VOTE IN MARCH FOR A REFORM THAT WILL REQUIRE  
EVERY LOCALITY TO PUBLISH EVERY PROPERTY ASSESSMENT -- AND TO  
DISCLOSE WHETHER SOME PROPERTIES ARE TAXED MORE LENIENTLY  
THAN MOST. IT WILL ALSO REQUIRE THE STATES TO CREATE QUICK  
AND EASY PROCEDURES FOR CITIZENS WHO WANT TO REMEDY UNJUST  
ASSESSMENTS.

THESE STEPS -- AND OTHERS THAT I WILL PROPOSE WITH  
THEM -- ARE PART OF A LARGER AND EVEN MORE VITAL CHALLENGE.  
ARE WE GOING TO HAVE GOVERNMENT IN SECRET OR GOVERNMENT IN  
THE SUNSHINE? THAT IS THE QUESTION. THE PEOPLE OF FLORIDA  
HAVE ALREADY ANSWERED BY SUPPORTING THE SUNSHINE LAW. NOW  
EVERY STATE IN THE NATION MUST MAKE A SIMILAR CHOICE. HERE  
IN FLORIDA, WHERE GOVERNMENT IN THE SUNSHINE GOT ITS START,  
YOU CAN VOTE IN MARCH FOR THE PRINCIPLE THAT PUBLIC  
BUSINESS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED IN PUBLIC VIEW.

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