

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

MARCH 21, 2008

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>>> THE FOLLOWING IS A SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF WEDU, TAMPA, ST. PETERSBURG, SARASOTA.

>> COMING UP NEXT, THE DEMOCRATS DECIDE NOT TO DO A REVOTE IN FLORIDA.

THERE'S A NEW PLAN IN TALLAHASSEE TO LOWER THE PROPERTY TAX AND RAISE THE STATE SALES TAX.

THREE PROPOSALS ARE MADE TO REDEVELOP TROPICANA FIELD.

AND BARACK OBAMA'S CONTROVERSIAL FORMER PASTOR HAS LONG TIES TO THE BAY AREA.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

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>> FROM THE WEDU STUDIOS, THIS IS "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."  
AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME BACK.

THIS WEEK, OUR PANELISTS ARE: WILLIAM MARCH IS A POLITICAL REPORTER AT THE "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE."

ANDREW SKERRITT IS A COLUMNIST AT THE "ST. PETERSBURG

TIMES."

APRIL SCHIFF IS A POLITICAL CONSULTANT AND A REPUBLICAN.

AND MITCH MALLET IS VICE-CHAIR OF THE MANATEE COUNTY

DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND A RADIO TALK SHOW HOST.

GOOD TO SEE YOU, EVERYBODY.

THANK YOU FOR COMING.

WELL, THE FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC PARTY ANNOUNCED MONDAY IT WOULD

NOT SPONSOR A REVOTE OF THEIR PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY BY MAIL.

TOO MANY PROBLEMS DEVELOPED, INCLUDING HAVING TO MATCH

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SIGNATURES.

LATER IN THE WEEK, TWO FLORIDA SENATE DEMOCRATS SUGGESTED A

DEAL THAT WOULD AWARD FLORIDA DELEGATES BASED ON A FORMULA

THAT RECOGNIZES CLINTON'S VICTORY IN THE JANUARY 29th

PRIMARY, AND OBAMA'S NATIONAL LEAD IN THE POLLS.

HOWEVER, THE TWO DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL RIVALS REFUSED TO

GO ALONG WITH THAT COMPROMISE.

>> YOU WANT TO BE, YOU KNOW, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED

STATES.

YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE WITH HUGO CHAVEZ AND KIM

JONG IL AND THE REPUBLICANS.

AND I'M NOT PUTTING THEM IN THE SAME, BUT YOU WANT TO BE

ABLE TO NEGOTIATE WITH EVERYBODY, START BY SHOWING THAT YOU

CAN NEGOTIATE WITH EACH OTHER.

>> HE'S NOT TRYING TO PUT HIM IN THAT CATEGORY, MITCH.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE DEMOCRATS' INABILITY TO COME UP

WITH SOME SORT OF PLAN?

>> IT'S OUTRAGEOUS.

IT REALLY IS.

IT'S TOTALLY OUTRAGEOUS HOW WE GOT HERE.

WHEN THE WHOLE THING STARTED, IT WAS TO PREVENT ALL THE STATES FROM HOPPING OVER EACH OTHER AND STARTING THE PRIMARIES IN SEPTEMBER.

THE HUSH WORD TO US WAS -- TO FLORIDA WAS, LISTEN, WE'RE GOING TO COUNT YOU BY THE TIME SUPER TUESDAY ROLLS AROUND OR A FEW WEEKS AFTER, WE'LL KNOW WHO THE CANDIDATE IS.

THAT CANDIDATE WILL SAY, HEY, COUNT FLORIDA, COUNT MICHIGAN AND WE'RE ALL GOING IN.

IT'S MORE OR LESS A TIE.

BARACK IS A LITTLE AHEAD.

NEITHER OF THEM WANT TO GIVE IT UP.

HILLARY WOULD LIKE TO COUNT FLORIDA.

BARACK IS HOLDING FLORIDA BACK BECAUSE HILLARY WILL GET MORE DELEGATES.

HOWEVER, BARACK SHOULD LOOK AT IT LIKE THIS BECAUSE WHEN THE DUST SETTLES, IF HE'S LESS THAN 50 DELEGATES AWAY FROM WINNING, THAT MEANS HILLARY WILL BE A FEW HUNDRED DELEGATES AWAY.

FLORIDA COULD GIVE THE ELECTION TO BARACK.

THAT COULD REALLY HAPPEN.

>> WILLIAM, YOU WROTE AT LEAST ONE FRONT-PAGE STORY THIS

WEEK ABOUT THIS.

WHY ARE THE DEMOCRATS UNABLE TO COME UP WITH SOME SORT OF COMPROMISE PLAN?

>> WELL, IT'S PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THEIR DELEGATE ALLOCATION.

THEY'VE GOT SUPER DELEGATES WHO ARE ON THEIR OWN AND CAN VOTE FOR WHOEVER THEY PLEASE IN ADDITION TO PLEDGE DELEGATES WHO ARE DIVIDED UP ON THE BASIS OF PRIMARY VOTES.

BUT THE BIG THING THAT NOBODY PREDICTED IS THAT THE RACE WOULD BE THIS CLOSE.

IF YOU'LL REMEMBER BACK LAST SUMMER, EVERYBODY YOU HEARD WAS SAYING ON SUPER TUESDAY, IT WILL BE ALL OVER.

THERE WILL BE A NOMINEE ON THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 5th.

IT WAS PRETTY CLOSE TO THAT ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE.

BUT ON THE DEMOCRATIC SIDE, IT WASN'T.

>> SO MITCH IS RIGHT ON THAT POINT.

>> OH, YEAH.

OH, YEAH, ABSOLUTELY.

THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE THIS HEAD-TO-HEAD RACE MAKES EVERYTHING, EVERY SINGLE DELEGATE, EVERY SINGLE ACTION CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT.

AND NOBODY FORECAST THAT, AND THAT'S SHOWING UP ALL THE WEAKNESSES IN THE SYSTEM, JUST LIKE IN THE 2000 PRESIDENTIAL RACE, THE FACT THAT THERE WAS AN EXTREMELY CLOSE RACE SHOWED UP ALL THE WEAKNESSES IN THE VOTE --

>> IS ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER HOLDING UP THE COMPROMISE OR ARE BOTH KIND OF REFRAINING FROM SITTING DOWN HAVING A BACKROOM NEGOTIATION ON A COMPROMISE?

>> THEY HAVE TOLD ME THAT THEY ARE NOT DISCUSSING A COMPROMISE WITH EACH OTHER.

"THEY" BEING THE TWO CAMPAIGNS.

WHETHER THAT'S TRUE OR NOT, I CAN'T PROMISE YOU.

IT'S JUST WHAT THEIR PRESS SPOKESPERSON IS TELLING ME.

THEIR POSITIONS ARE, HILLARY CLINTON'S VIEW IS THAT FLORIDA OUGHT TO COUNT 100% JUST AS IT WAS, JUST AS THEY VOTED.

>> JANUARY 29th NUMBERS.

>> RIGHT.

>> THE POLLS REFLECT THAT'S PRETTY ACCURATE TO WHAT'S GOING ON TODAY.

>> EXACTLY.

BARACK OBAMA'S VIEW IS THAT CLINTON SHOULD RECEIVE NO ADVANTAGE WHATEVER FROM THE JANUARY 29th VOTE.

NOW, THE COMPROMISES RANGE ANYWHERE IN BETWEEN AND THE COMPROMISE THAT BILL NELSON SUGGESTED WAS THAT HILLARY CLINTON GETS HALF OF THE ADVANTAGE THAT SHE WON JANUARY 29th.

BUT I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF THE TWO CANDIDATES MOVING AT ALL MUCH LESS ALL THE WAY.

>> YOU REPORTED THAT THIS HAS TICKED OFF DEMOCRATIC DONORS.

>> OH, ABSOLUTELY.

>> WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

>> THEY ARE SAYING GIVE ME MY MONEY BACK.

SOME OF THEM -- SOME OF THE LARGE DONORS IN FLORIDA HAVE ASKED FOR REFUNDS ON MONEY THEY RAISED FOR THE NATIONAL PARTY.

THEY STILL WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO OBAMA OR TO CLINTON OR TO MAYBE EVEN THE STATE PARTY, BUT THEY WANT MONEY BACK FROM THE NATIONAL PARTY.

>> APRIL, YOU ARE SMILING THROUGH ALL OF THIS.

[ LAUGHTER ]

>> WE'RE JUST GOING TO KEEP SMILING, TOO.

WE'RE REALLY HAPPY TO SEE THE DEMOCRATS -- SENATOR BILL NELSON SAID THIS IS A POLITICAL TRAIN WRECK, AND IT IS A POLITICAL TRAIN WRECK.

THEY CREATED THEIR OWN DISASTER.

THEY SUPPORTED -- NO, THE BILL WAS COSPONSORED BY A DEMOCRAT.

THEY SUPPORTED IT WHEN IT PASSED.

>> NOT THE BILL THAT PASSED.

NOT THE BILL THAT PASSED.

THE BILL THAT PASSED WAS NOT SPONSORED.

>> BUT IT WAS SUPPORTED BY DEMOCRATS IN THE HOUSE WHEN IT PASSED.

IT HAPPENED, AND IT'S DONE.

NOW THAT IT'S DONE, THEY ARE GOING TO CHANGE THE RULES.

WHAT THEY HAVE DONE IS THEY'VE CREATED A DISASTER FOR THEMSELVES, AND THEY HAVE SHOWN THAT THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY DOES NOT HAVE ANY LEADERSHIP, HOW WILL THEY WIN THE WHITE HOUSE?

IT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN WITH THIS TYPE OF BEHAVIOR.

>> ANDREW, YOUR PAPER REPORTED THIS WEEK THAT SOMETHING LIKE 25% OF VOTERS SAID THEY WOULD BE LESS INCLINED TO VOTE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE BECAUSE OF THIS MESS.

>> AND THAT IS TROUBLING.

THAT IS EXTREMELY TROUBLING.

BECAUSE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE TURN OUT TO VOTE ON JANUARY 29th.

I VOTED BECAUSE I THOUGHT, YOU KNOW, SOMEBODY SMART WILL FIGURE THAT ALL THE VOTES OUGHT TO COUNT.

I THINK AS WE SIT HERE, THIS IS A CLASSIC DEMOCRATIC PROBLEM.

YOU KNOW, ON A YEAR WHEN THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TALKING ABOUT WINNING, THEY ARE CONSPIRING TO LOSE THE GENERAL ELECTION.

I'M NOT SURE WHO WILL SAVE THEM.

MAYBE A BAD ECONOMY WILL SAVE THEM, BUT IT'S REALLY TROUBLING THAT THEY HAVE MANAGED TO SCREW THIS UP THIS BADLY.

>> THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT IT IS A CLASSIC, SELF-INFLICTED DISASTER.

I'LL ARGUE WITH APRIL OVER THE DETAILS, BUT THIS IS --

>> ABOUT THE OUTCOME.

>> AND AS FAR AS 2008 ELECTION AND THE PROSPECTS THAT THEY HAD GOING INTO THIS, THIS IS LIKE MOHAMMED ALI FINDING A WAY TO LOSE TO A PARAPLEGIC GRANDMOTHER.

[ LAUGHTER ]

>> DON'T LAUGH.

YOU'RE THE PARAPLEGIC --

[ LAUGHTER ]

>> WE HAVE HAD -- IN THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS, WE'RE HAVING DEMOCRATS CALL INTO REPUBLICAN HEADQUARTERS TRYING TO SEE HOW THEY CAN SUPPORT AND WORK FOR MCCAIN.

IT'S HAPPENING ALREADY.

>> THAT'S NOT HAPPENING.

>> YES, IT IS.

>> MITCH, LET ME ASK YOU THIS, IN A NEW YORK TIMES OP-ED PIECE THIS WEEK, MICHIGAN SENATOR CARL LEVIN POINTED OUT THAT NEW HAMPSHIRE BROKE THE RULES BY MOVING UP ITS PRIMARY DATE SO EARLY.

YET, THE DNC DIDN'T INSTITUTE ANY PENALTIES AGAINST NEW HAMPSHIRE.

LEVIN'S POINT IS THAT MICHIGAN AND FLORIDA ARE BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY.

>> WELL, THERE'S A GOOD ARGUMENT THERE.

ALL THE STATES STARTED JUMPING.

THE PROBLEM WITH HOWARD DEAN WAS, ALL THE STATES WANTED TO JUMP.

IF YOU LET THEM ALL JUMP, WE WOULD END UP STARTING THE PRIMARIES IN SEPTEMBER.

SO HE DREW A LINE IN THE SAND.

AFTER THE DUST SETTLED -- BECAUSE HE DREW THE LINE IN THE SAND FEBRUARY 1st.

AFTER THE DUST SETTLED, HE SHOULD HAVE THEN JUST SAID, ALL RIGHT, I DREW THE LINE HERE.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN RESOLVED VERY EASILY.

WE HAVE TWO STATES THAT A WEEK BEFORE THE DEADLINE WILL ACCEPT THAT AND LET'S MOVE FORWARD.

IT WOULD HAVE ALL BEEN ALL OVER, BUT, NO, WE'RE DEALING WITH THIS NOW.

AND I WANT TO CHALLENGE THE BARACK CAMPAIGN. BECAUSE THEY KEEP SAYING WE SHOULD GO WITH THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

WELL, THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE SPOKE ON JANUARY 29th, AND THE POLLS SHOW THAT'S PRETTY MUCH REFLECTIVE OF THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE TODAY.

HE SHOULD JUST ACCEPT THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE FROM FLORIDA AND ALLOW THE VOTE TO CONTINUE.

>> WE SHOULD SAY THAT YOU'RE A CLINTON BACKER.

>> I AM A CLINTON DELEGATE.

AND I WANT TO GO -- AND I WANT TO GO TO DENVER.

>> LIKE WE HAD THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE IN 2000 AND THE

DEMOCRATS WERE SCREAMING YOU ARE DISENFRANCHISING VOTERS AND  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

>> WHY COULDN'T DEMOCRATS HAVE USED THE REPUBLICAN FORMULA,  
JUST CUT IT IN HALF?

>> WE WERE PENALIZED.

>> YEAH, YEAH.

THAT WOULD SEEM TO BE A SIMPLE OUTCOME.

>> THE DEMOCRATS HAD A HARsher PENALTY SPECIFIED IN THEIR  
RULES THAN THE REPUBLICANS DID.

>> WILLIAM, IS THERE ANY CHANCE IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS -- I  
THINK IN ONE OF YOUR STORIES YOU WROTE ABOUT JON AUSMAN, WHO  
IS A MEMBER OF THE DNC GOING TO THE DNC AND TRYING TO GET  
THEM OR APPEALING TO THEM TO TRY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

>> THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS THAT I SEE -- POSSIBLE  
SOLUTIONS.

I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN, YET, ANY CONCRETE SIGN OF EITHER ONE  
OF THEM HAPPENING, BUT THESE ARE TWO AVENUES WHERE I THINK A  
SOLUTION COULD COME FROM.

ONE IS, FLORIDA AND MICHIGAN DEMOCRATS GET TOGETHER AND GO  
TO THE DNC'S RULES AND BYLAWS COMMITTEE.

AND BECAUSE NOBODY EXPECTED THIS CRISIS TO BE THIS BAD, BUT  
NOW THAT IT IS THIS BAD, MAYBE THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL  
COMMITTEE AND ITS RULES AND BYLAWS COMMITTEE WILL BE MORE  
AMENABLE TO COMING UP WITH SOME SORT OF SOLUTION.

SO ONE POSSIBILITY IS FLORIDA AND MICHIGAN GET TOGETHER AND

GO WITH THE PROPOSAL THAT THE DNC DICTATES.

THE OTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT THE CLINTON AND OBAMA CAMPAIGNS GET TOGETHER AND COME UP WITH A COMPROMISE THAT THEY CAN AGREE ON, AND THEY TAKE THAT TO THE DNC.

>> FINALLY, WHAT ABOUT THIS IDEA THAT THE DEMOCRATS ARE CONCEDING FLORIDA TO THE REPUBLICANS THIS YEAR BY THEIR INACTION ON THIS ISSUE?

>> WELL, THAT'S A VERY PLAUSIBLE SUGGESTION.

THE LAST TWO ELECTION CYCLES, THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES, AL GORE AND JOHN KERRY, FOUGHT HARD IN FLORIDA.

THEY LOST BOTH, AT LEAST THEY LOST 2004.

DEMOCRATS WILL SAY THEY WERE CHEATED OUT OF IT IN 2000.

BUT THE POINT IS, THERE WERE DEMOCRATIC PARTY EXPERTS AND POLITICAL OPERATIVES THEN WHO SAID YOU ARE WASTING YOUR TIME AND MONEY TO FIGHT IN FLORIDA.

A DEMOCRAT DOES NOT NEED FLORIDA TO WIN THE WHITE HOUSE.

A REPUBLICAN CANNOT WIN WITHOUT FLORIDA, BUT A DEMOCRAT CAN.

DON'T BOTHER WITH FLORIDA.

SPEND THE \$30 MILLION IT COST TO CAMPAIGN HERE IN OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA AND OTHER STATES.

THERE IS -- THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE QUESTIONING WHETHER OBAMA HAS DECIDED TO GO THAT ROUTE.

AND, THEREFORE, DOESN'T CARE IF HE ANGERS FLORIDA VOTERS.

>> INTERESTING.

WELL, GOVERNOR CHARLIE CRIST GAVE A LUKEWARM ENDORSEMENT

THIS WEEK TO A SWAP OF A HIGHER SALES TAX FOR A LOWER PROPERTY TAX.

THE MEASURE WILL APPEAR ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT.

THE TAXATION AND BUDGET REFORM COMMISSION APPROVED THE AMENDMENT.

IF PASSED, IT WOULD LOWER THE TYPICAL PROPERTY OWNER'S TAXES AN AVERAGE OF 25% BY 2011 BY ERASING THE PORTION OF THE TAX BILL THAT PAYS FOR SCHOOLS KNOWN AS THE REQUIRED LOCAL EFFORT.

BUT IT ALSO REQUIRES THE LEGISLATURE TO REPLACE SCHOOL FUNDING THROUGH A COMBINATION OF RAISING SALES TAXES, CLOSING TAX LOOPHOLES, DEEPLY CUTTING BUDGETS OR RELYING ON GROWTH.

CRITICS SAY A SALES TAX INCREASE WOULD HURT THE POOR THE MOST.

>> WE REMAIN CONCERNED THAT FLORIDIANS WILL BE SHOCKED TO SEE HOW PROPERTY TAX RELIEF HAS BECOME A SALES TAX INCREASE IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

>> IF THE LEGISLATURE CLOSES EXEMPTIONS AND CAN PRODUCE FOUR TO EIGHT BILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF DOLLARS, YES, WE WILL BE OKAY.

IF NOT, THERE'S GOING TO BE ONE HECK OF A SHORTFALL AROUND HERE.

>> APRIL, IS THAT THE WAY YOU SEE IT, IF NOT, THERE WILL BE A HECK OF A SHORTFALL?

BASICALLY, IF YOU LOWER THE PROPERTY TAX, YOU'RE LOSING ABOUT \$9.3 BILLION IN REVENUE.

IF YOU RAISE THE SALES TAX BY 1%, YOU'RE GAINING ABOUT 3.3, \$3.6 BILLION IN REVENUE.

SO THERE IS A BIT OF A SHORTFALL THERE, RIGHT?

>> THERE'S A BIT OF A SHORTFALL AND THE PUSH IS TO DIMINISH SPENDING.

LET'S GET THE SPENDING UNDER CONTROL AND TRY AND MAKE IT WORK THAT WAY.

I THINK WHAT YOU'RE SEEING HERE IS A TRUE BELIEF THAT AMENDMENT ONE WASN'T QUITE ENOUGH.

AND THIS, HOPEFULLY, WILL BRING A LITTLE BIT MORE RELIEF TO THOSE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR RELIEF.

AND IT'S MORE -- I SEE -- IT'S A SPENDING PROBLEM.

IT'S NOT A REVENUE PROBLEM.

WE'VE HAD A REVENUE STREAM THAT'S BEEN PHENOMENAL OVER THE LAST YEARS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

SO WILL THERE BE A SHORTFALL?

YES.

HOW DO YOU MAKE IT UP?

YOU QUIT SPENDING TOO MUCH MONEY AND CUT BACK AND GET A LITTLE BIT MORE EFFICIENT.

THE EXEMPTIONS, THE SALES TAX EXEMPTIONS, THEY'LL FORCE THEM TO LOOK AT THOSE AND THOSE NEED TO BE LOOKED AT.

THEY NEED TO BE REVIEWED AND REVISED.

I DOUBT THAT YOU'LL SEE A SERVICE TAX.

THAT'S PART OF THE SCARE TACTIC, BECAUSE -- THE SERVICE TAX WAS A FAILURE THE LAST TIME WE DID IT.

SO THAT'S PROBABLY NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.

BUT IT WILL GO ON THE BALLOT, AND IT'S GOING TO GO ON AS A TAX DECREASE.

IT'S NOT A TAX INCREASE.

IT'S A TAX DECREASE.

>> MITCH, IS THAT THE WAY YOU SEE IT --

>> NO, THIS IS TYPICAL REPUBLICAN GOING, BLAME IT ON SPENDING.

WE HAVE TO CUT BACK, CUT BACK.

YOU WANT TO IMPROVE EDUCATION, YOU WANT TO CUT BACK, ALL YOU REALLY NEED TO DO IS CLOSE UP SOME OF THESE CRAZY LOOPHOLES IN THE SALES TAX, AND THERE YOU GO.

THERE'S THE GAP.

DEAL DONE.

>> THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE JUST SAID.

>> I MEAN, WOULD YOU -- ARE YOU SAYING THAT WITHIN THE SCHOOL SPENDING BUDGET THERE ARE SIX, FIVE-AND-A-HALF OR SIX BILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF FAT AROUND THE STATE?

>> I THINK WITHIN THE BUDGET THERE'S A LOT OF FAT AROUND THE STATE.

WHAT YOU NEED TO SEE IS TOUGH SCRUTINY OF THAT AND SPENDING WITHIN THE MEANS.

>> WHERE IS THE FAT?

>> THERE'S A LOT OF IT.

ACROSS THE BOARD, THERE'S A LOT OF IT.

>> YOU NEED TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOLS.

YOU DON'T IMPROVE THE SCHOOLS BY TAKING MONEY AWAY.

>> YOU DON'T IMPROVE THE SCHOOLS BY THROWING MONEY AT THEM  
EITHER.

YOU BECOME MORE EFFICIENT.

YOU DO THINGS MORE EFFICIENTLY AND MORE INTELLIGENTLY THAT  
WORK.

>> ANDREW?

>> WHAT TROUBLES ME, THOUGH, WE'LL BE ASKED TO VOTE ON THIS.  
IT'S GOING TO TAKE A WHILE BEFORE WE FINALLY SEE THE IMPACT  
OF AMENDMENT ONE.

I THINK IT'S WAY, WAY TOO SOON TO ASK VOTERS TO VOTE ON  
THIS.

BECAUSE I THINK WE'LL BE VOTING PRETTY SOON NOT KNOWING,  
BECAUSE THERE ARE A LOT OF DIRE PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE  
LONG-TERM EFFECTS FROM A REVENUE STANDPOINT OF AMENDMENT  
ONE.

IF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THOSE SHORTFALLS AND THEN IF WE'LL  
BE LOSING MORE MONEY BECAUSE OF THIS ISSUE, AND THERE WAS NO  
SIGN THAT SPENDING IS -- ALL SPENDING HABITS ARE GOING TO  
CHANGE.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THINK THEY WILL, BUT THERE'S NO INCENTIVE.

>> IF THERE'S NO MONEY TO SPEND, THAT MIGHT FORCE SPENDING HABITS TO CHANGE.

>> WILLIAM, ONE OF THE PROMISES THE GOVERNOR HAS MADE IS THAT HE WOULD NOT -- I BELIEVE HE SAID THAT HE WOULD HOLD SCHOOL SPENDING HARMLESS IN HIS BUDGET DECISIONS, AND THAT HE WOULD TRY TO PROTECT IT AND BE A CHAMPION OF SCHOOL SPENDING.

IF WE GO THROUGH AND WE CAN'T MAKE UP THIS FIVE-AND-A-HALF BILLION DOLLAR SHORTFALL THAT MIGHT COME IF YOU SWAP HIGHER SALES TAX FOR LOWER PROPERTY TAX, WHAT DOES THAT DO TO THE GOVERNOR'S PROMISE?

>> WELL, THE GOVERNOR'S PROMISE AT THAT POINT HAS A PROBLEM. THE GOVERNOR BELIEVES THAT THE NEW GAMBLING REVENUES FROM THE EXPANSION OF CASINO GAMBLING THAT HE'S AGREED WITH IS -- I THINK THAT'S ONE OF THE MAIN THINGS HE WAS COUNTING ON TO KEEP THAT PROMISE.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE -- I DON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE THE BACKUP FOR THAT PROMISE IS GOING TO COME FROM.

IN SPITE OF WHAT APRIL SAYS, THERE ARE SOME CONSERVATIVES WHO ARE STARTING TO BACK OFF OF THIS PLAN, THOUGH, BECAUSE OF HOW LARGE AN INCREASE IN THE SALES TAX IT MIGHT CAUSE. THE PLAN SPECIFIES THAT ONE OF THE OPTIONS IS A PENNY INCREASE IN THE SALES TAX, BUT THE EFFECT OF IT COULD BE CLOSER TO TWO-AND-A-HALF CENTS.

AND AT THAT POINT, WHEN A \$10 WRENCH STARTS COSTING OVER

\$11, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO START TO NOTICE.

>> APRIL, JUST GOING BACK TO ONE THING YOU SAID, YOU THINK THAT THERE'S STILL STEAM OUT THERE IN THIS ANTI-PROPERTY TAX MOVEMENT THAT WAS OUT THERE THE LAST YEAR OR SO.

YOU THINK THERE'S STILL STEAM IN THAT, THAT IT WASN'T TAKEN AWAY BY THE PASSAGE OF AMENDMENT ONE EARLIER THIS YEAR.

>> NO, I BELIEVE THERE IS DEFINITELY LEADERSHIP THAT BELIEVES THAT AMENDMENT ONE WAS NOT ENOUGH IN PROPERTY TAX RELIEF.

AND THERE ARE ORGANIZATIONS OUT THERE MOVING FORWARD ON TRYING TO PERPETUATE MORE TAX RELIEF.

>> JUST YES OR NO FROM THE OTHER PANELISTS.

DO YOU THINK THAT STEAM THAT APRIL TALKS ABOUT IS STILL OUT THERE AMONG FLORIDA VOTERS?

IS THERE STILL A MOOD AMONG FLORIDA VOTERS TO FURTHER CUT PROPERTY TAXES IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA?

>> YES, IT IS, BUT I THINK IT'S VERY MISGUIDED.

YOU SAVE 250 HERE AND SPEND 500 THE OTHER WAY.

>> MITCH?

>> I THINK YOU HAVE TO LOOK -- LIKE FOR THE SMALL BUSINESSMAN ON ANNA MARIA ISLAND, THERE ARE SMALL BUSINESSES THERE WHERE THE PROPERTY TAX IS BEING EVALUATED AND THE BEST USE -- MAYBE YOU CAN AGREE --

>> HIGHEST AND BEST USE.

>> HERE YOU HAVE LITTLE BEACH SHOPS SELLING BEACH BALLS AND

TOWELS AND WHATEVER, AND THEY ARE BEING TAXED AS IF THERE'S A MULTIMILLION DOLLAR RESORT THERE.

LIKE MY HOUSE --

>> THERE'S STILL STEAM OUT THERE, AND YOU THINK THE STEAM IS STILL OUT THERE?

>> YES, THERE IS DEFINITELY STILL STEAM OUT THERE, BUT IT'S KIND OF DIVIDED BECAUSE THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAVE OUR HOMES BREAK WHO AREN'T FEELING ANY PAIN AT ALL.

>> OKAY.

WELL, THREE PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN MADE TO REDEVELOP TROPICANA FIELD IF THE RAYS BASEBALL TEAM MOVES TO DOWNTOWN ST. PETERSBURG.

ONLY ONE OF THE THREE NATIONAL DEVELOPERS ANNOUNCED WHAT IT WOULD PAY FOR THE TROPICANA SITE, \$50 MILLION.

THE RAYS ALREADY HAVE SAID THAT THEY PLAN TO CONTRIBUTE \$150 MILLION TOWARD THE DOWNTOWN STADIUM.

PINELLAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER KEVIN WELCH TELLS "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE" THAT WOULD LEAVE A TWO TO THREE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLAR GAP IN THE COST OF THE NEW STADIUM.

THE QUESTION IS, WILL PINELLAS TAXPAYERS BE ON THE HOOK FOR THAT AMOUNT?

ANDREW, I MEAN, THAT WAS NOT EXPLAINED IN THESE BIDS THAT WERE ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK.

WHERE IS THIS EXTRA MONEY GOING TO COME FROM?

>> FROM THE PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS PAY, TAXPAYERS.

AND THIS IS ONE OF THOSE SITUATIONS WHERE YOU'VE GOT A  
WONDERFUL IDEA, BUT IT CLEARLY NEEDS MORE PLANNING.

THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE DETAILS ON THE TABLE.

\$50 MILLION IS JUST NOT A GOOD OFFER.

AND I KNOW ANOTHER COMPANY WANTS THE CITY TO PICK UP THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL COST.

THAT'S ANOTHER BIG QUESTION MARK IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH THAT  
WILL COST.

I THINK -- HERE IS A SITUATION WHERE -- COULD BENEFIT FROM A  
NEW STADIUM.

I THINK THEY NEED TO TAKE THEIR TIME AND REALLY THINK ABOUT  
THIS ONE.

TOO MANY TIMES, THE TAXPAYERS, MANY WHO DON'T WATCH  
BASEBALL, END UP HAVING TO PAY FOR IT.

>> I GUESS THE MAYOR WILL EVALUATE THE PROPOSALS, GET THEM  
AT THE END OF APRIL OR MAYBE THE THIRD WEEK IN APRIL.  
AND THEN THEY WANT TO HAVE MORE DETAILED PROPOSALS BY  
JUNE 5th.

>> HOW ABOUT A FOURTH PROPOSAL?

JUST LEAVE THE STADIUM WHERE IT IS.

JUST LEAVE IT THERE.

>> BAD TIMING TO GO TO THE TAXPAYERS AND ASK FOR MONEY TO  
BUILD A NEW STADIUM WHEN YOU HAVE A STADIUM.

>> BASEBALL TEAM THAT'S PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, AND NOW THEY  
WANT THE TAXPAYERS TO UNDERWRITE PRIVATE ENTERPRISE.

>> ALL RIGHT.

WELL, THE REVEREND JEREMIAH WRIGHT, JUNIOR, THE CONTROVERSIAL PASTOR AND SPIRITUAL MENTOR OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BARACK OBAMA HAS LONG-STANDING TIES TO THE TAMPA BAY AREA.

FOR YEARS, WRIGHT HAS ANNUALLY VISITED AND SPOKEN AT BIBLE-BASED FELLOWSHIP CHURCHES IN TAMPA'S CARROLLWOOD AREA AND TEMPLE TERRACE.

THE PASTORS OF BOTH CONGREGATIONS HAVE KNOWN WRIGHT FOR 25 YEARS, AND HE'S SCHEDULED TO SPEAK NEXT WEEK AT THE TEMPLE TERRACE BIBLE-BASED FELLOWSHIP CHURCH.

LOCAL SUPPORTERS SAY THE REVEREND WRIGHT IS NOT THE ANGRY FIREBRAND SEEN IN RECENT VIDEO CLIPS BUT A KIND AND INTELLIGENT MAN BOLD ENOUGH TO SPEAK THE TRUTH.

WELL, FIRST OF ALL, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS VISIT TO TAMPA IN THE WAKE OF ALL THIS NATIONAL PUBLICITY?

>> WELL, IT'S A ROUTINE THING FOR THE REVEREND AND FOR THE CHURCHES THAT ARE HOSTING HIM.

I THINK ONE THING THAT THAT INDICATES IS THAT REVEREND WRIGHT, MAYBE IN SPITE OF THE SORT OF INFLAMMATORY CLIPS THAT EVERYBODY HAS SEEN, IS REALLY SOMETHING -- IT BACKS UP WHAT BARACK OBAMA SAID, WHICH IS THAT BLACK CHURCHES ARE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WHITE PEOPLE AND WHITE CHURCHES EXPECT, AND THAT REVEREND WRIGHT IS NOT THAT FAR OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM IN BLACK AMERICA.

>> ANDREW, YOU HAVE ATTENDED ONE OF THESE CHURCHES.

YOU'RE NOT A MEMBER, BUT YOU'VE ATTENDED ONE OF THESE CHURCHES.

TELL US, WHERE DID YOU ATTEND?

>> I'VE BEEN TO BIBLE-BASE, WHICH IS ONE OF THE PLACES --

>> THE CARROLLWOOD.

>> YEAH.

AND THE THING THAT STRUCK ME, THE ISSUES THAT THE MINISTER WAS CONCERNED WITH WERE MORE PROGRESSIVE, TYPICALLY FOR A LOT OF BIG CHURCHES, EVEN A LOT OF BLACK CHURCHES NOW, YOU HEAR THEY ARE GOING A LOT MORE CONSERVATIVE AND YOU HEAR A LOT OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL.

BUT THIS IS A THROWBACK.

I LIVED IN SOUTH CAROLINA WHERE YOU HEAR A LOT OF THIS SOCIAL -- THE SOCIAL COMMENTARY ON IT.

AND -- I'M NOT GOING TO MAKE ANY EXCUSE FOR HIM, BUT WHAT HAPPENS IS A LOT OF CONVERSATIONS THAT WE HAVE -- THAT BLACK PEOPLE HAVE, WHITE FOLKS HAVE.

THEY ARE NOT INHERENTLY RACIST, BUT IF ANOTHER RACE HEARS THE SAME CONVERSATION, THEY WOULD BE -- THEY COME AWAY WITH NOT BEING SHOCKED AT THE CONVERSATION.

WHICH IS A TRAGEDY FOR BARACK OBAMA WITH THIS WHOLE ISSUE, BECAUSE HE WAS A CANDIDATE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE TRANSCENDING RACE AND OF ALL THE PLACES, THIS ISSUE IS ONE THAT'S HURTING HIS CAMPAIGN THE MOST.

>> I GOT TO SAY, I HAPPEN TO KNOW BOTH OF THE PASTORS AT BOTH OF THESE CHURCHES, AND I KNOW BOTH OF THEM.

THEY ARE NOT RADICALS.

ONE HAS LONG-STANDING TIES.

HE WAS A CORPORATE EXECUTIVE FOR A LONG TIME.

SO IT'S HARD FOR ME TO BELIEVE THAT, YOU KNOW --

>> IT'S A NONISSUE.

IT'S JUST A NONISSUE.

TAKE A MAN'S LIFE'S WORK, DONE ALL THIS GOOD, TAKE A COUPLE OF CLIPS AND THEN TRY TO JUDGE HIM.

IT'S RIDICULOUS.

>> WELL, BUT IT'S NOT GOING TO BE A NONISSUE.

IN POLITICS, THAT'S WHAT THEY'LL USE AGAINST HIM.

IT'S UNFORTUNATE THAT THAT'S HAPPENING TO OBAMA, BUT THAT'S REALITY, AND THAT'S WHAT GOES ON IN THE POLITICAL WORLD.

>> [ ALL SPEAKING AT ONCE ]

>> -- PLAYED OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

>> OF COURSE, IT'S POSSIBLE.

AND I THINK IT'S UNFORTUNATE THAT IT COULD DAMAGE HIS CAMPAIGN WITH SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

IT ISN'T EVEN WHAT HE SAID.

YOU KNOW?

>> IT IS GOING TO HURT HIM.

>>> FINALLY EACH WEEK, WE ASK OUR PANEL ABOUT ANOTHER STORY FROM THE WEEK OR ON THE HORIZON THAT AFFECTS PEOPLE HERE IN

WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA.

WILLIAM, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WELL, MY OTHER BIG STORY IS THE STATE'S DEAL WITH CSX, THE CSX RAILROAD COMPANY TO PAY HALF A BILLION DOLLARS TO CSX IN RETURN FOR SOME TRACKS TO USE TO START A COMMUTER RAIL LINE IN CENTRAL FLORIDA BETWEEN ORLANDO AND LAKE LAND. THIS IS MOVING THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE IN SPITE OF SOME STRONG INDICATIONS THAT THIS PLAN, WHICH WAS PRETTY MUCH DEVELOPED IN SECRECY BY FORMER GOVERNOR JEB BUSH, POSES SOME REAL PROBLEMS FOR THE STATE.

LIABILITY IS ONE.

AFTER THE STATE BUYS THESE TRACKS, IF AN ACCIDENT HAPPENS ON THE TRACK, EVEN IF IT'S CAUSED BY A CSX TRAIN, THE STATE STILL PAYS FOR THE COST.

LEGISLATORS ARE BEGINNING TO ASK ABOUT THIS, BUT IT'S NOT STOPPING THE DEAL, WHICH IS CONTINUING TO MOVE THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE, AND THERE ARE NOW INDICATIONS THAT IT'S GOING TO COST A GOOD DEAL MORE THAN WHAT IT'S BEEN SAID TO.

>> ANDREW, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WELL, IT'S A NATIONAL STORY, NOT NECESSARILY FLORIDA. THE UNWILLINGNESS OF ALL POLITICIANS TO REALLY TALK ABOUT THE ECONOMY.

WE WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE.

WE WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE PASTOR, BUT WE DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE FACT THAT THE DOLLAR IS IN THE TANK.

WALL STREET IS IN TROUBLE.

AND WE REALLY HAVE NO FIXES.

>> THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IN THE POLLS.

MITCH, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WE'RE EITHER GOING TO HAVE AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN FOR THE FIRST TIME OR A WOMAN ON THE DEMOCRATIC TICKET.

PUTTING ALL POLITICAL CORRECTNESS ASIDE, I DON'T THINK AMERICA IS READY TO ELECT A VIETNAM VET TO THE WHITE HOUSE.

[ LAUGHTER ]

I JUST DON'T THINK SO, AT LEAST NOT IN MY LIFETIME.

AND IF HE IS ELECTED, THIS WHOLE COUNTRY IS GOING TO EXPERIENCE VIETNAM FLASHBACKS.

WE'RE GOING TO SEE THE DRAFT COME BACK, AND THIS WAR IS JUST GOING TO GO ON AND ON AND ON.

>> ALL RIGHT.

APRIL, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> THE SWEETBAY SECURITY BREACH.

I THINK THAT WAS REALLY BIG.

THEY STILL DON'T KNOW HOW FAR IT HAS GONE.

THERE WERE LIKE 14 TO 2,000 PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED FRAUDULENT ACTIVITY IN THEIR ACCOUNTS BECAUSE OF THE TRANSACTIONS BEING STOLEN AS THEY WERE TRANSMITTED THROUGH THE INTERNET.

THIS IS SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY GOING TO HAVE TO BE LOOKED AT BECAUSE THE INTERNET IS IN ITS INFANCY.

THIS WILL GET BIGGER AND BIGGER AS PEOPLE CONTINUE TO BUY THINGS OVER THE INTERNET AND THROUGH ATM CARDS AND HAVE NO MONEY, WE NEED SOME CREDIT THINGS THAT ARE TAKING CARE OF SOME OF THIS STUFF.

>> THANK YOU, ANDREW SKERRITT.

THANK YOU, MITCH MALLETT.

THANK YOU, APRIL SCHIFF.

AND THANK YOU, WILLIAM MARCH.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WRITE US OR CALL US WITH YOUR FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROGRAM.

OUR E-MAIL ADDRESS IS FTW@WEDU.ORG.

AND OUR TOLL FREE LINE IS 800-335-9338.

YOU CAN WATCH THIS SHOW ONLINE BEGINNING EARLY NEXT WEEK.

YOU'LL FIND IT AT WEDU.ORG.

PLEASE SHARE THAT ADDRESS WITH YOUR FRIENDS AROUND THE STATE WHO CARE ABOUT STATE AND LOCAL POLITICS.

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK" RETURNS NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT AT 8:30,

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT 12:30.

FROM ALL OF US AT WEDU, HAVE A GREAT WEEKEND.

>> -- WHO IS SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS CONTENT.