

July 31, 2001

Statement of Mayor Evelyn Sirrell

As the mayor of Portsmouth, another community hit hard by this blatantly unfair state property tax, I can certainly understand the great frustration of the citizens of Newington and other donor towns over this issue. And Portsmouth is watching what happens here with great interest.

As you know, we have taken the lead in the successful fight to overturn the property tax in Superior Court, and we are continuing the fight in the state Supreme Court, and will continue to fight in Concord.

Now that the Legislature has voted to make the state property tax permanent, the citizens of New Hampshire need to turn their frustration into political action to overturn this tax. This Newington petition is one form of democracy at work. Portsmouth is exploring all possible means, including political action, to win this battle.

New Hampshire has the country's highest reliance on property taxes to fund state and local services-- more than twice the national average. Property taxes are continuing to rise -- putting too many elderly and low and middle-income people in danger of losing their homes.

In Portsmouth, 20 cents of every dollar we collect in property taxes is going out of the city to pay for the state property tax or county services. This just isn't right. We are going to continue fighting the statewide property tax at every level possible.

Here in Newington, democracy is at work and the people are speaking out in response to this grossly unfair tax.

Portsmouth is one of 27 New Hampshire communities committed to finding a fair and equitable funding solution to an adequate education. The Coalition Communities have been fighting since May 1999 for an alternative to the inequitable and unfair state property tax. Portsmouth will be required to send \$3.7 million, an increase of the \$1.7 million we have to pay now, to the state next year. The other Coalition Communities are Alton, Bridgewater, Eaton, Franconia, Freedom, Grantham, Greenland, Hampton, Hampton Falls, Hanover, Hart's Location, Hebron, Jackson, Lincoln, Meredith, Moultonborough, New Castle, New London, Newington, North Hampton, Rye, Sandwich, Seabrook, Stoddard, Sunapee and Waterville Valley.