

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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## Housing state of emergency

Around Oregon, home prices and rents are soaring, and homelessness is on the rise

By Don McIntosh

In Portland, City Council declared a housing state of emergency Sept. 7 — for the second year in a row. The emergency is real, and worsening rapidly.

Portland home prices are now out of range for most working people. The median sale price is \$385,000, having risen at or above 10 percent annually for the last five years.

Portland rents, meanwhile, are rising on average 12 percent a year — faster than anywhere else in the nation, and four or five times the rate that wages are increasing. Rising rents are shaping up to be an enormous and permanent shift of income from renters to landlords: At current average rents, two years of double-digit increases amount to about \$600 million taken out of the pockets of tenants in Portland alone. About 47 percent of Portland households — roughly 125,000 in all — are renters.

And unaffordable rent is contributing to rising homelessness. Shantytowns are cropping up under bridges, along railroad tracks, and in parks and on the sidewalks of residential neighborhoods. As many as 4,000 people may be living on Portland streets.

Portland City Council's response to the emergency has focused on supply. The market failed to supply affordable rental housing, so the City will offer tax abatements to developers in exchange for temporary commitments to rent some units affordably. Relaxed zoning codes will make it easier for homeowners to build detached housing units on existing lots. A \$258 million bond issue will pay to construct 1,300 units of affordable housing for lower-income renters.



"This isn't just a Portland metro crisis. We're seeing a 0 percent vacancy rate in Prineville. It really is an urban, rural and mid-sized community crisis. This is a critical issue facing working people. In order to address it, we need to level the playing field between landlords and tenants." — **Graham Trainor, Oregon AFL-CIO political director**



"We're seeing an uptick of people who still have their jobs and are living in cars. These are working families, union households that are living in their car with kids." — **Eryn Byram, Labor's Community Service Agency outreach specialist**



"Our students are coming to school tired because after getting evicted, they're sleeping on couches, floors, or in cars. They're coming to school hungry because their parents had to spend food money to cover the rent increase. They're coming late because after moving out to the fringes, they are being bused back into town through traffic." — **Elizabeth Thiel, Portland Association of Teachers vice president**



"[City commissioners] need to get their priorities straight and assign the correct urgency to the humanitarian crisis that is facing our city right now." — **Steve Demarest, SEIU Local 503 president**



"I'm sending a message to landlords ... The days of treating tenants as human ATMs and the days of predicating their business model on their unfettered right to exploit us, are numbered." — **Chloe Eudaly, Portland Commissioner-elect**



"We will no longer accept underfunded education, underfunded senior services, underfunded health care and childcare and children's services while the biggest corporations who do business in our state get away with offshoring their profits and skirt paying their taxes. We are saying, 'If you are going to profit off our communities, you are going to invest in our communities.'" — **Family Forward Oregon Executive Director Andrea Paluso**

## Measure 97 backers plan to take their campaign to the Legislature

The union-backed coalition wants corporate tax transparency — and for big corporations to pay their fair share.

well as shed light on how much big corporations actually pay in taxes.

Measure 97 would have raised \$3 billion a year with a 2.5 percent tax on corporate sales over \$25 million. Oregon unions put extraordinary resources into the campaign for Measure 97, led by Oregon Education Association (OEA), \$5.2 million; Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503, \$3.5 million; and Oregon AFSCME, \$1.5 million. Initial polls showed strong ma-

By Don McIntosh

A Better Oregon — the coalition of union, business and community groups that backed Ballot Measure 97 — won't be shutting down just because the measure lost.

At a packed Nov. 17 press conference, coalition leaders announced they'll ask the state Legislature to step up and solve Oregon's revenue problems, as

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**COMMUNITY SERVICE:** IBEW Local 48's Electrical Workers Minority Caucus participated in an International Day of Service Nov. 19 to honor America's service men and women. EWMC and IBEW chapters across the United States and Canada took the day to help veterans. Last year, all 33 EWMC chapters contributed over 5,000 hours of community service. This year members of Local 48 prepared breakfast for veterans at the Fisher House in Vancouver, Washington, above. The facility provides temporary housing for veterans receiving medical care.

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