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...Housing state of emergency

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It's not enough, says the union-backed group Portland Tenants United.

"No one facing a \$500 rent increase is going to say, 'Thank God for the housing bond,'" says Lewis & Clark College instructor Margot Black, who helped found the group.

At a Nov. 18 press conference outside City Hall, Portland Tenants United called on City Council to enact rent control. As practiced in other U.S. cities, rent control limits rent increases to a certain maximum, such as the overall rate of inflation. Rent control is by far the most potent tool to stop runaway rent increases, but the Oregon Legislature, at the request of the landlord lobby, enacted legislation in 1985 prohibiting Oregon cities from enacting rent control ordinances. Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland) said she'll seek to overturn that prohibition next year.

But Portland Tenants United says the city doesn't have to wait. The state law banning rent control provides a temporary exception in the event of a natural or man-made disaster that



Laid-off Daimler Machinist Local 1005 member Mike McLaren had his rent increased from \$600 to \$1,100 from one month to the next. Rent increases like that are becoming commonplace in Portland. At Labor's Community Service Agency, outreach specialist Eryn Byram says over the last year she's seen the almost complete disappearance of any Portland-area rental housing under \$1,000 a month. From mid-2015 to mid-2016, LCSA's temporary hardship assistance program helped 87 union members with money for rent or security deposits.

materially eliminates a significant portion of housing. Black says Airbnb, which may have taken more than 1,000 units off the long-term rental market, is such a disaster, and that it has materially eliminated housing.

So it's calling for the city to enact an emergency rent freeze — and a moratorium on "no cause" evictions.

Steve Goldberg — a retired longtime labor lawyer now assisting Portland Tenants United — says there is legal precedent that would support the city's right to take action on a rent freeze.

City Commissioner-elect Chloe Eudaly, who defeated incumbent Steve Novick, will be the only renter on City Council when she takes office in January. And her rent has risen 60 percent in the last four years. At the Portland Tenants United

press conference, Eudaly said it was her landlord's rent increase that made her get active politically.

"I support the call for an emergency rent freeze, whether that requires an act of municipal disobedience or not," Eudaly said. "I argue that the cost of not acting is much greater than any legal penalties we may face."

Oregon AFL-CIO political director Graham Trainor says housing affordability was one of the top issues legislative candidates heard on voters' doorsteps this election cycle, so lawmakers know they must do something about the crisis.

The AFL-CIO will be working as part of the Stable Homes for Oregon Families Coalition on two solutions: an end to no-cause evictions, and removal of the prohibition on rent control.

NATIONAL

Strike at O'Hare airport and around the country

At the world's fourth-busiest airport, about 500 airplane cabin cleaners, baggage handlers, janitors and wheelchair attendants took part in a one-day strike Nov. 29, calling for a \$15 hourly wage, a union, and better work conditions. The workers aren't officially union-represented but are seeking to be represented by Service Employees Local 1. Their jobs used to be union-represented and better paid, but in 2011, then-newly-elected Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel contracted out airport service work, which meant the loss of 320 union jobs at O'Hare. Now most of the workers are paid \$10 to \$11 an hour at firms like Prospect Airport Services and AirScrub Inc., and some make as little as \$8.25 an hour, Illinois' minimum wage. SEIU has alleged unsafe working conditions and wage theft in complaints to OSHA and the U.S. Department of Labor.

SEIU-sponsored Fight for \$15 campaign also held solidarity protests at 18 other airports, and demonstrations at more than 300 McDonald's restaurants across the country.

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