

# Realtors' constitutional rewrite

The national push to end real estate transfer taxes has one real estate agent crying foul

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
STAFF WRITER

The fact that the National Association of Realtors wants to change the Oregon Constitution doesn't sit well with Chris Bonner.

And she's a member.

For more than two decades she's been a licensed real estate agent and a member of the national organization and its local affiliates, the Oregon Association of Realtors and the Portland Metro Association of Realtors.

And within that network, she says there are members who are either unaware of what the national association is trying to do, or confused as to why its proposition, Measure 79, is even a priority at all.

That National Association of Realtors is the driving force behind the measure that would rewrite the state constitution to prohibit the state or any local government from creating a real estate transfer tax or fee. In fact, the association assessed its members a fee to pay into the campaign.

The real estate transfer tax is a small percentage assessment on the sale of a

house, and it is regularly a political football with affordable housing advocates who see it is a new, sustainable funding source for low-income housing.

As it stands now, the Oregon State Legislature has already established a ban on such fees, requiring a vote by representatives in Salem to overturn the law. Washington County is the only county in the state to have a transfer tax, 0.1 percent, and it would be grandfathered in.

Proponents of the measure say it's a financial burden in an already stressed market. (They are organized as Protect Oregon Homes.) The campaign says the fee would be a double tax, on top of property taxes, and would put new homes out of reach for many families, and hurt families who are already forced to sell their homes at a loss.

So why is Chris Bonner telling people to vote no?

**Chris Bonner:** I know it sounds ironic as a Realtor to say that I'm encouraging people to vote no on this, but there are a couple of reasons why. I think it's bad tax planning



Chris Bonner

policy to make it possible for trade organizations to come in and throw hundreds of thousands, if not a million, dollars into a state to amend its constitution when there's no public groundswell that is inviting them in. This is purely generated

from a national trade organization, the National Association of Realtors, wanting to pre-emptively and proactively put measures on the table that stop municipalities from being able to make that decision if necessary to raise revenue. And the way it is worded is confusing.

**Joanne Zuhl:** This would alter the constitution. There's already a prohibition.

**C.B.:** Yes - there's already a prohibition. This is taking it to the next step. saying that you can never ever, as a state or a municipality, decide that you want to use this as a revenue-generating tool. It takes it off the table for anyone to even consider. I just think that's a bad way to plan your tax policy. I don't think it's appropriate. There should citizens of Oregon decide that they want to affect change in the constitution. Not because a trade organization decides that it would be good for their members - they think - to do so.

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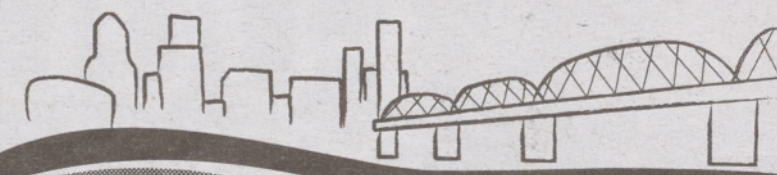
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