

State lawmakers: Step up to the housing plate

Trying to understand all of the policy decisions being made by both the Trump administration and the Oregon State Legislature is like waiting for the impact of a car crash.

It's that moment when time stands still and you know you're about to have a bad accident, you're just not sure what the actual impact is going to be and if everyone will be OK. It's sure to be traumatic.

The reality is that the decisions being made by the current administration and the cuts being proposed by the State Legislature are going to create real pain for Oregonians. In some

cases, it will potentially result in a complete collapse of the safety net for thousands of Oregonians and millions of Americans.

In his first week in office, President Donald Trump has already signed executive orders to begin to undermine the Affordable Healthcare Act, and made sweeping changes to hurt first-time homebuyers. That's the tip of the iceberg. He's intent on restricting women's health worldwide and creating Muslim registries. He's already moving forward with the suppression of scientists and climate change education. The list grows longer every day.

Did I mention that the president has also signed an executive order to potentially cut funding for all sanctuary cities, including Portland? Home Forward, Portland and Multnomah County receive about \$45-50 million in federal funding for homeless services alone – about half of the current investments.

To add insult to injury, the state of Oregon, barring a revenue fix, is more or less in one of the worst positions possible to respond to a federal meltdown. Due to our current tax structure, the state is estimating a shortfall of \$1.8 billion.

There's no sugarcoating cutting health insurance for up to 335,000 Oregonians from the Oregon Health Plan, or making massive cutbacks in services for senior services, housing, mental health and more. That's exactly what the State Legislature could be doing barring some kind of revenue fix at the state.

It is a disaster.

Meanwhile, we have state legislators and lobbyists who are playing politics and oppose tenant rights and eviction reform – along with cutting back subsidies on Oregonians who own more than one home,

Some groups around the state believe we don't need housing reform. The leadership of the Realtors and landlords are out for blood, and it's blood they will get. The blood of poor and middle-class Oregonians who can't afford

to maintain a safe place to call home.

After all, we are talking about the Realtor organization that not too long ago spent millions of dollars and went on the offensive to successfully ban a real-estate transfer tax from happening in Oregon – a tax that would have created an enormous amount of revenue and equity for affordable housing in Oregon. They wanted their cake – and eat it, too. They still do. Now they want to offer Oregonians breadcrumbs for rent assistance in exchange for not creating tenant laws to protect renters. Unreal.

There are many elected officials, including Democrats in Salem, who remain on the fence regarding housing reform. Legislators need to stop drinking the Kool-Aid, or at the very least find another way to fund their political campaigns and represent the people.

Nonprofits are forced to adapt. So should politicians. The writing is on the wall.

The harsh reality is that local communities will suffer the most. It's trickle down economics at its best and we're not talking about numbers here, friends, we're talking about people's lives.

Both Portland and Multnomah County have been front-loading money for housing and homeless services for years. Those ongoing investments aren't guaranteed. The housing bond will help, but it's small in scale to the problems we are facing on the horizon.

So what do we do?

First and foremost, the City of Portland and Multnomah County have to continue to go all in on housing in next year's budget.

Finding ways to improve the system to maintain and create more affordable housing is essential.

Local leaders should also know that regardless of the consequences, we not only want a sanctuary city, but a city that refuses to work in any way, shape or form with federal officials targeting immigrants and refugees – period.

The state of Oregon and the business community have to find a compromise and work toward creating a revenue package that will at the very least stop the bleeding. The business community has to step up to the plate and put their money where their mouth is. If not, all Oregonians will suffer.

As for all of us readers, I suppose your guess is as good as mine. Call your elected officials. Raise hell. Commit to direct action if necessary. Refuse to be silenced. Be in solidarity with other social movements and people. Be prepared for anything.

The reality is we are living in unprecedented times, not unlike an Arab Spring, where people flood the streets and refuse to leave under any circumstances until government leadership steps aside. It's not all together out of the question.

It's a historic time, and we support our state and local lawmakers in answering the call to action.



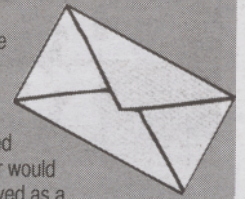
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