

Tina Kotek talks poverty, tenant protections

Street Roots had the chance to ask Oregon legislator and Speaker of the House Tina Kotek some questions this week about poverty and the 2017 legislative session, which began Feb. 1. Here are her written responses.

Israel Bayer: *How are you maintaining your sanity given the political climate we find ourselves in?*



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

Tina Kotek: I'm trying not to read too much national news. We've got such a long to-do list here in Oregon, I've been able to put almost all of my energy into the work here. That said, I'm ready and willing to respond when Oregonians are threatened by unjust policies coming out of D.C.

I.B.: *The revenue forecasts for Oregon spell out clear pain for poor and working class Oregonians around our state – with a possible \$1.8 billion deficit projected. Is there a silver lining somewhere on the horizon or should we all be prepared for the worst?*

T.K.: I need your readers to help us create the silver lining. Oregon is 50th in the nation for corporate taxation, and it is time to change that. Go to oregonlegislature.gov to find out who your state senator and state representative are, and let them know you're concerned about the impact that budget cuts would have on poor and working-class Oregonians. With all of the increased awareness post-Measure 97, I think we have a window to create a better future for Oregon.

I.B.: *What is the answer in the short-term to fix Oregon's revenue shortfalls and what are the long-term solutions?*

T.K.: On Jan. 19, our chief budget writers released a framework for the current, two-year budget cycle that is within the bounds of current law revenues. This existing

resources framework provides an opportunity to scrutinize agency budgets for savings, ensure we can meet our constitutional obligation to balance the budget, and encourage legislators and the public to wrestle with the difficult choices that our current resources create.

In the weeks ahead, we want to hear directly from the public about what their priorities are. The budget-writing committee is kicking off a seven-city, statewide town hall tour on Feb. 10. In order to make long-term, game-changing investments in our schools, health care and critical services, I believe that we need business tax reform. Whether you agree or disagree with that, we need Oregonians from around the state to share their priorities for the state budget now and going forward.

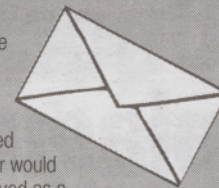
I.B.: *Affordable housing programs around Oregon have been underfunded for so long it feels like we're never going to get to a place where we are actually scaling up our investments to prioritize meeting the needs of Oregonians facing a housing crisis. What I mean by that, is it feels like every year in Salem housing advocates and elected officials spend an enormous amount of energy to get what feels like peanuts compared to the investments needed to support local communities. Is this perception real? What will it take to convince our current governor and future governors to prioritize affordable housing the same way we prioritize education and transportation?*

T.K.: First, I've got to say that Governor Brown has been a champion for affordable housing. She helped lead the effort to create LIFT, an affordable housing program that helps finance the construction of affordable housing for low-income households. The first set of funding was awarded in January, which will help build 12 projects that will provide 965 Oregon families with a place to call home. Still, you're right – we have to fight really hard, and often for several years in order to make any progress on

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Write in

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PHOTO COURTESY OF TINA KOTEK

Tina Kotek is Oregon's Speaker of the House, and a representative serving District 44, North and Northeast Portland. Her district includes St. Johns, the Port of Portland, University of Portland and the Portland International Airport.