

Time for lawmakers to go big on housing

In the past few months, a bar owner brandished an assault rifle at police. He was drunk and upset at individuals experiencing homelessness in the

community. Another man tossed a homemade bomb under an RV frustrated at people experiencing homelessness camping outside his residence. The bomb didn't go off, thank goodness. Both of the individuals walked with only a slap on the wrist.

Last month, a business owner shot and killed an individual

experiencing a mental health crisis in his parking lot. The individual was homeless. The Portland Mercury reported this week that a Multnomah County grand jury decided the business owner was justified in killing the homeless man.

All of the individuals walked with only probation or nothing at all.

Now, I'm not saying the police and the district attorney's office aren't doing everything they can or aren't getting it right in these specific cases. Regardless, it sure does send an interesting message to the general public about how we can treat people experiencing homelessness. Don't get me wrong. I'm not a crime-and-punishment kind of guy. Still, there's a big difference in being frustrated due to homeless camps or having to deal with someone having a mental health collapse, and pulling out an assault rifle, throwing a bomb or actually killing an individual.

The twisted irony is that the very system that isn't punishing any of these individuals for their actions is more than willing to spend an enormous amount of resources and energy to enforce and prosecute "quality of life" laws criminalizing people experiencing homelessness.

Meanwhile, the homeless person ends up actually doing time in the county jail for not having the resources to play the game. It truly is a crime to be broke in America.

It's all the more reason to support Oregon House Bill 2215, Oregon's Right to Rest Act. The bill would end the criminalization of sleeping while homeless, while working to support the basic human and civil rights for all people, regardless of their housing status. The bill would ensure

that all people have a right to restful sleep and equal access to public space preserved. Call you state reps today!

Speaking of it being a crime to be broke in America, the unwavering attacks on health care and the possibility of a \$6 billion federal budget cut for housing and homeless programs and mental health services is enough to make your brain explode.

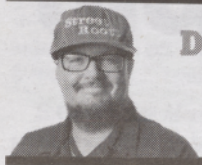
Let's not forget that nearly 40 years ago the Reagan administration began to dismantle housing investments around the United States. It's the reason we have modern-day homelessness to begin with. Today, the Trump administration appears ready to burn the entire house to the ground.

It's all the more reason I believe local elected officials should be less concerned about homeless shelters and more concerned about how they're going to obtain long-term revenue options to support homeless programs and more affordable housing. If we as a community continue to get lost playing small ball instead of keeping our eyes on the bigger prize we are in deep trouble.

If only a fraction of what the Trump administration has threatened comes true, it's going to be absolute madness on our streets. Not to mention that there's no reason to think that in the coming years we're going to get anywhere near the relief we need from Salem. They continue to give us bread and expect poor people to find the roses. It's a crying shame.

The mayor of Seattle is doubling down on the homeless and housing emergency there and going back out to voters (after just passing a housing levy) to support investment in mental health services and housing. In Los Angeles, the city passed a sales tax this week for \$355 million annually for homeless services. This comes only four months after passing a \$1 billion housing bond. Talk about big time.

I believe our regional leaders should be thinking about the same thing. To let up on the gas at this point would be a grave failure. We just might be on the verge of seeing one of the largest spikes in homelessness and poverty in American cities in our lifetime, possibly since the Great Depression. Now is not the time to be managing the problem. Now is the time to go big or - eventually - go home. If there's a home left that is. Time will tell.



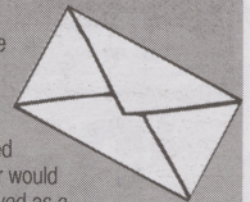
DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

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