

Legislative session leaves little for the poor to celebrate

The 2017 Oregon legislative session started with big promises this past year. Both the business community and legislatures said they would find a way to avoid massive cuts to safety net programs by creating a revenue package that would tax large corporations.

Unfortunately, the legislative session is ending this week without much to celebrate.

It's not surprising.

The message sent to the residents of Oregon is that government and big business care more about politics and protecting the profits of large corporations than they do about

Oregonians in general.

Of course, people smarter than me could argue that's not the case. Maybe they are right. Maybe they aren't.

Look, I don't want to add to the chorus of non-believers who believe government has failed us.

I believe in the idea that without government it's impossible to have a healthy society. Unfortunately, it's clear that the needs of the many have been set aside in Salem for the benefit of the few.

I'm sure there are a thousand reasons why a revenue deal wasn't created this legislative session. I'm sure many of them are valid. It's easy to cast stones without knowing all of the moving parts and barriers faced by legislators.

Saying that, it won't be legislators or lobbyists stuck in small communities or the big towns in Oregon not taking a vacation this summer. It won't be legislators or lobbyists feeling the hardships of a family member that doesn't have adequate mental health care or access to good schools or has to worry about paying the rent or being evicted from their homes for being poor.

You tell me how only months after watching Donald Trump becomes the president of the United States that blue Oregon wasn't able to deliver on a revenue option and basic tenant rights.

It's not surprising in the least that we have poor Oregonians around the state turning to more radical political movements that believe many progressive Oregonians are out of touch with reality.

Ask any number of people who can no longer live in their neighborhoods, towns or cities due to rising rents and the lack housing opportunities.

The number one priority for housing advocates going into this legislative session was passing laws that would help protect renters from massive rent hikes and help prevent homelessness throughout Oregon by finally standing up to the landlord lobbyists.

Of course, some people will blame Portland advocates like myself for not understanding the politics of rural Oregon. Fair enough. Looking in the mirror, it's clear that housing and social justice advocates have a lot of work to do to organize the folks in rural Oregon.

We'd do much better having community organizers at bike rallies, truck stops and trailer parks than we would hiring more lobbyists in suits to get us the same results.

The reality is poor Oregonians won't be enjoying craft beers at breweries across Oregon, or wine tours in the Willamette Valley or short-term rentals in Cannon Beach this summer. Most poor Oregonians will be drinking cheap beer and eating shit underneath bridges, in trailer parks or back behind the shed trying to figure out how to pay rent next month and scrape enough money together to feed their broken and restless families.

I hope Oregon lawmakers see the writing on the wall. Even the Trump supporters can read it, believe it or not. It's time for change.



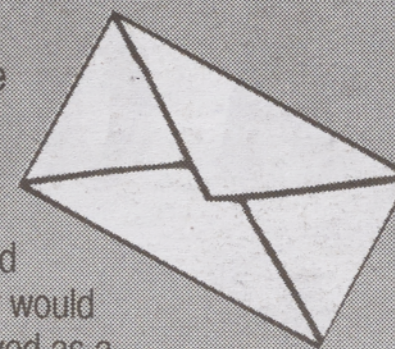
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