

Time to move forward with an action plan for affordable housing

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BY ALISON MCINTOSH
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Just a short month ago, the Oregon Legislature adjourned the 2017 session. The Legislature had the chance to act during the Legislative session to take a bold step forward to address our state's housing crisis for the 4 in 10 people who rent their homes in Oregon, and they failed.

Our housing crisis is complex, and requires many approaches and solutions. While the Legislature did act on many fronts to address our housing crisis, one solution in particular would have provided basic protections for people who rent their homes. House Bill 2004 would have given people who rent their homes in Oregon more stability and security than they do today. Oregon's Senate, a group of people elected to solve problems and represent the people of our state, failed to even consider, much less pass HB 2004.

Tenants across Oregon are struggling with no cause evictions and rent increases

they cannot pay. In southern Oregon towns like Medford and Ashland, vacancy rates hover near one percent. In Central Oregon, places like Bend, Redmond, LaPine, and Prineville, tenants all compete for the same few apartments that come available each month. In Hood River and at the coast, an increasing number of vacation rentals mean fewer and fewer apartments for families to raise their kids. In the Portland metro area, particularly in east county, rents go up a staggering amount each year while wages aren't keeping pace.

We all need a safe, stable place to call home regardless of whether we rent our homes, own our homes, or are searching for a home. And yet far too many of our neighbors are sleeping in tents, cars, shelters, under bridges or on a family member's couch.

Oregon's laws allow tenants to be evicted at any time, for no reason at all. Even worse, because landlords can simply give evictions "without a cause," these evictions can be given for discriminatory reasons or to retaliate against a tenant who has asserted their rights or asked for a repair. In addition, Oregon's laws allow landlords to raise the rent as much as they want, however many times they want, in a given year.

While some cities, notably the city of Portland, have enacted temporary protections for renters, far too many Oregonians live with the instability and insecurity of knowing they can be asked to leave at any time, for any reason.

The Legislature did make substantial investments in preserving existing and building new affordable housing, as well as emergency rent assistance. These investments will provide many thousands of Oregonians with a safe and affordable place to call home, and they are critical.

These investments are not enough. In

addition to these investments, we need more from our Legislature. We need our elected leaders to act boldly. We need our elected leaders to pass policies to provide basic protections to people who rent their homes and we need our elected leaders to allow cities across Oregon to be able to prevent displacement through important policies like rent stabilization.

We know we can solve the problems faced by our communities.

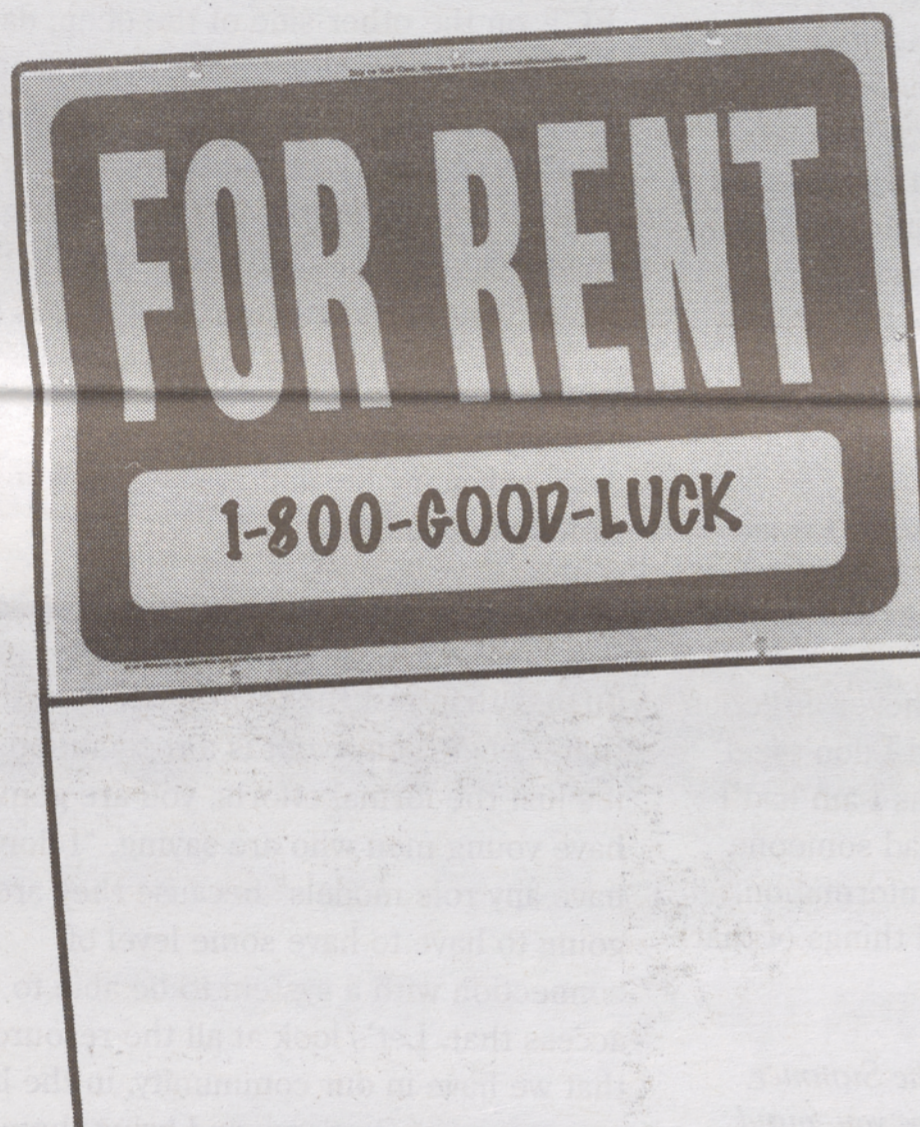
Solving the housing crisis should be the top priority of the Legislature. When every child in Oregon has a safe and stable home, kids will do better in school and graduation rates will improve. When every senior and family has a safe and stable home, our community's health will be stronger. When parents have safe and stable housing, their productivity at work increases. Housing provides the foundation for all of our lives, and when everyone has the safety and stability of a home, so many other things fall into place.

So what next?

Our elected leaders need to hear from you – their constituents – to help them understand that solving our housing crisis should be one of their top priorities. The Legislature needs to hear from you that their work fell short.

So how are you going to act? Will you attend one of your Legislators' monthly coffee sessions or town hall meetings? Will you set up a meeting with other concerned neighbors to ask them to act to address the housing crisis? Will your congregation join other faith groups across the state to solve this problem? Let us know how we can support you, and please make an action plan today.

Our housing crisis impacts all of us. Our community is better and stronger when we all have a place to call home. We can solve this problem. We're counting on you.



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