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# OPINION

## Working Together for the Common Good

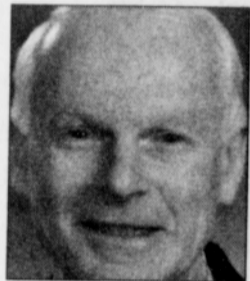
### My support for Lew Frederick on the blight of abandoned houses

BY REP. DENNIS RICHARDSON

There once was a group of men at a church who had the assignment to move a grand piano from one room to another. The piano was very heavy and several of the concerned volunteers discussed ideas on how to move it without harming themselves or the piano. Finally, a wise man suggested they all should gather close around the piano and together "lift where you stand." They did so and the piano was easily moved because of the unified effort. What we do here in the Oregon State Legislature is often like the men in this story.

Politics is a team sport. In state government, no legislation can pass without a majority vote of legislators in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate, followed by the Governor's signature.

As state representatives we are elected by



voters in only one of Oregon's 60 House districts, yet we are elected to serve the best interests of all the residents of the entire state and not merely those in our own districts. That's why for more than a decade, I have focused so much of my effort on balancing the state budget, invigorating the state's economy, and promoting a world-class educational system.

In addition to statewide policy, individual legislators have issues in their own districts that deserve to be addressed without concern for party or politics.

Whenever possible, I try to "lift where I stand" and help other legislators craft solutions that benefit the people in their districts.

For instance, Rep. Lew Frederick, D-north and northeast Portland, came to our Consumer Protection and Government Efficiency Committee with a bill (HB 2662) to help his Portland neighborhoods do something about the blight of abandoned houses that attract squatters, drug dealers and derelicts.

Of Oregon's homes in foreclosure nearly 1/3 are vacant. Rep. Frederick's bill originally contained provisions that assessed up to a \$150 fine per day against property owners who failed to maintain their properties, and did not suggest a solution to the underlying

problem. As introduced, such provisions were likely to kill his bill.

After the public hearing I asked Rep. Frederick what he was trying to accomplish. He said his goal was to enable residents in blighted neighborhoods to do something about abandoned homes that often sit empty for years and become public nuisances. In some cases community leaders are unable to even determine the whereabouts of the property owners. We worked together to amend the language in his bill.

The final version enables communities to place notices on such abandoned properties and, when possible, to notify the owners of the need to clean up and maintain their properties. If the nuisance is not corrected, local government now has the power to do the maintenance or make necessary repairs on the properties and place a priority lien on the county records for the amount of the "actual and demonstrable costs" incurred by the local government.

The final version of HB 2662A is a win/win for all concerned. Neighbors now have a means to correct the blight of an abandoned house and yard; local government now have a process where an abandoned house in a neighborhood can be maintained and the

costs incurred eventually will be repaid when the house is sold or refinanced; and, even the abandoned property's owner may be benefited when the house finally is sold, since it was not allowed to grossly deteriorate, become a meth lab or an attractive nuisance to squatters.

Rep. Frederick was gracious during his House floor speech by referring to my assistance with his bill. HB 2662A passed both the House and Senate and has been signed into law.

Legislators on both sides of the aisle can provide hundreds of similar stories of working together for the common good. Since news reports generally focus on political acrimony and discord, I thought you might appreciate knowing that it is common practice, among the rank and file members of the House and Senate, for legislators to work together for the benefit of the citizens who live and work in all districts across the great State of Oregon.

It's an honor to work with such dedicated legislators and to serve the citizens of my district and all of Oregon.

Rep. Dennis Richardson is a Republican lawmaker from Central Point, Ore., serving parts of Jackson and Josephine counties.

## Can't Live with 'It Could Have Been Worse'

### Congress must act on voting rights

BY JULIAN BOND

The racial picture in America has improved remarkably in my lifetime, so much so that a black man has been elected and re-elected President of the United States — an unthinkable development just a few years ago.

But paradoxically, Barack Obama's victory in 2008 convinced many that all racial barriers and restrictions had been vanquished and we had entered racial nirvana across the land.

This was just one of the many unfair burdens placed on Obama's presidency. We knew that his victory didn't herald a post-civil rights America or mean that race had been vanquished. It couldn't eliminate structural inequity or racist attitudes.

The truth is that Jim Crow may be dead, but racism is alive and well. That's the central fact of life for every non-white American, including the President of the United States. It eclipses income, position, and education. Race trumps them all.

Our first order of business now needs to be demanding that Congress reformulate the pre-clearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act, which the Supreme

Court has just invalidated.

Like the Court's affirmative action ruling the day before, the voting rights decision could have been worse.

But we can't live with "it could have been worse," especially when it comes to voting. We must insist on "it has to be the best."

This ruling was devious and perverse.

It was devious because the Court's majority used Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act to effectively end Section 5, essentially voiding the federal government's ability to guarantee minority access to the polls. At the same time, the ruling sidestepped the court's historic deference to Congress and blamed lawmakers for not updating the formula.

It was perverse because these justices cited the fact that large numbers of blacks voted in 2012 as a reason to take away the law that allowed them to vote.

Today, we have much more to work with and we take heart that so much has changed. The changes that have come have everything to do with the work of the modern movement for civil rights.

There needs to be a constantly

growing and always reviving activist movement across America if we are going to maintain and expand victories and our vision for the country.

We must not forget that Martin Luther King, Jr. stood before and with thousands — the people who made the mighty movement what it was.

From Jamestown's slave pens to Montgomery's boycotted buses, these ordinary men and women labored in obscurity. From Montgomery forward they provided the foot soldiers of the freedom army. They shared, with King, "an abiding faith in America."

They walked in dignity, rather than ride in shame. They faced bombs in Birmingham and mobs in Mississippi. They sat down at lunch counters so others could stand up. They marched and they organized.

King didn't march from Selma to Montgomery by himself. He didn't speak to an empty field at the March on Washington.

There were thousands marching with him, and before him, and thousands more who did the dirty work that preceded the triumphal march.

The successful strategies of the modern movement for civil

rights were litigation, organization, mobilization, and coalition, all aimed at creating a national constituency for civil rights. Sometimes the simplest of deeds — sitting at a lunch counter, going to a new school, applying for a marriage license, casting a vote — can challenge the way we think and act.

Racial justice, economic equality, and world peace — these were the themes that occupied King's life. They ought to occupy ours today.

We have a long and honorable tradition of social justice in this country. It still sends forth the message that when we act together we can overcome.

A first order of business might be gathering in Washington on Aug. 24 to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington and to demand that Congress act to correct the Supreme Court's many wrongs.

Julian Bond is Chairman Emeritus of the NAACP Board of Directors.

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