

## OTHER VIEWS

Jimmy Jones



## Our economy is pushing more into homelessness

Oregon is facing a new housing crisis beyond anything we have seen to date. Desperately needed eviction prevention programs have poured more than half a billion dollars into the rental market since 2020, protecting thousands that lost income during the pandemic. A series of eviction moratoriums and tenant protections, in support of the financial resources, have kept Oregon evictions low.

In a typical pre-pandemic year, there were roughly 18,000 evictions — about 1,500 a month. To our collective credit, the numbers of evictions have not returned to that prepandemic level, though the gap shrinks every month.

We can take no solace, however, in these numbers.

A prepandemic eviction is not the same as one now, because opportunities for rehousing are minimal. Nor are the numbers of evictions even close to the number of people losing their housing for inability to pay.

Many more have voluntarily left their homes rather than face formal eviction. Many leave when they receive notice of legal action, hoping to spare their families the trauma of a knock at the door and a lockout.

Research suggests these informal self-evictions are 5.5 times the number of actual eviction filings. So the 1,122 Oregon evictions in March hides another 5,600 households who lost their homes. This economic violence falls heavily on the poorest of our citizens, especially on people of color.

This is both an economic crisis for our working poor and yet more evidence of the callous consequences of white supremacy in Oregon.

Just as the cost of single-family homes has skyrocketed, rental costs have bludgeoned our working poor, increasing by 50%. New units are coming online rapidly, but not fast enough to matter. And most of the new units will be market rate.

Vacancy rates hover at 2-2.5%, making rental stock heavily competitive, and availability dependent on tightening conditions of credit and wages that can support a 3-to-1 income-to-rental cost ratio. Much of the perceived affordability baked into that old 3-to-1 ratio is smoke and mirrors. Inflationary forces in the Consumer Price Index pushed prices up 8.5% last month, the largest recorded increase since the recession year of 1981.

Wages have not kept up with the cost of living, and the gains in wealth have mostly been reserved for homeowners. Increased wages are more heavily concentrated in white collar and professional work, and are less visible in unskilled labor. That means that low-income families have to pay more, especially for gas and food, creating painful choices for the working poor: “Do we buy groceries, or put gas in the tank so we can get to work this week?”

The gold standard for understanding the impact of these high rents and their relationship to income and housing stability is the concept of “cost burdened” (households spending 30% of their income on housing costs and utilities) and “severely cost burdened” (households spending 50%-plus).

In April, the National Low Income Housing Coalition reported that “extremely low income” households in Oregon are 87% cost burdened, and 76% severely cost burdened. “Very low income” households are 80% cost burdened and 36% severely cost burdened. These households are one bad break from homelessness.

Runaway basic-need inflation makes the already high number of rent-burdened households in Oregon greater than it otherwise appears. Those that lose their homes have nowhere to go. Thousands more are living on the absolute edge, unable to afford basic standards of living for fear of becoming homeless. Every day there are women living with their children in cars. And elderly and disabled folks who cannot afford the rental increases and must go hungry to make rent.

Some will solve their own problems. Many will not.

For those evicted, they will face a gauntlet of few open rental units, at impossibly high prices, with credit and other personal and financial history barriers that are too great to overcome. Some of those, the lucky ones, can live with their families.

Others will join our large and growing homeless population. Just this week, the metro counties released their homeless numbers for 2022, showing a 25% increase over 2019. Central Oregon saw a 17% increase.

Our homeless crisis is no longer a phenomenon that can be dismissed as a crisis of personal responsibility and poor choices. The next generation of Oregon’s homeless are today’s working poor families.

We have reached a cliff, where if we fail to act there will be two Oregons tomorrow, one rich and one poor. One with a future, and one fighting every day to survive.

*Jimmy Jones is the executive director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency in Salem. The agency provides anti-poverty and harm-reduction programs in Marion and Polk counties, and some program areas serve as many as 11 Oregon counties. Jones also serves as the chairman of the Legislative Committee of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon. He is also a member of the Housing, Homelessness and Human Services Committee of the Governor’s Racial Justice Council.*

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, WE CAN FINALLY START LOSING OUR COVID WEIGHT.



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## Freedom and sacrifice is a call to all

## OTHER VIEWS

Jack James



With Memorial Day approaching on Monday, May 30, I thought it would be prudent and contemporary to highlight a young Oregon warrior who made the ultimate sacrifice for this great nation: Marc Lee.

Historically, Memorial Day is a national holiday set aside to remember our military members who fought and died. Typically, the World War II generation is highlighted, and rightly so. However, the service and sacrifice of those who died in the Korean War and Vietnam War should never, ever be forgotten.

I would also contend that since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, our country has been at war for over 20 years. Men and women, who entered the military service after 9/11 and chose to do a military career, have spent 20 years at war. As a retired military person, this fact is staggering to me and should be to every citizen of this county.

Lee, grew up in Oregon, enlisted in the Navy after 9/11, and became a Navy SEAL. He was a special person as you will find out when you read his last letter home, which follows. His maturity and insight to life, death, war and citizenship was beyond his years. But I would also contend that Lee was also simply a good example of his generation of volunteer warriors and patriots. Young people who have been volunteering to go in harm’s way for you and for me, for over 20 years now. Please read Marc Lee’s last letter home, let it sink into your soul, and just perhaps, do what he recommends.

Thank you.

Lee’s last letter home (written July 2006):

Glory is something that some men chase and others find themselves stumbling upon, not expecting it to find them. Either way it is a noble gesture that one finds bestowed upon them. My question is when does glory fade away and become a wrongful crusade, or an unjustified means by which consumes one completely?

I have seen war. I have seen death, the sorrow that encompasses your entire being as a man breathes his last. I can only pray and hope that none of you

will ever have to experience some of these things I have seen and felt here. I have felt fear and have felt adrenaline pump through my veins making me seem invincible. I will be honest and say that some of the things I have seen here are unjustified and uncalled for. However, for the most part we are helping this country. It will take more years than most expect, but we will get Iraq to stand on its own feet.

Most of what I have seen here I will never really mention or speak of, only due to the nature of those involved. I have seen a man give his food to a hungry child and family. Today I saw a hospital that most of us would refuse to receive treatment from. The filth and smell would allow most of us to not be able to stand to enter, let alone get medicine from. However you will be relieved to know that coalition forces have started to provide security for and supply medicine and equipment to help aid in the cause.

I have seen amazing things happen here; however I have seen the sad part of war too. I have seen the morals of a man who cares nothing of human life. ... I have seen hate toward a nation’s people who has never committed a wrong, except being born of a third world, ill-educated and ignorant to Western civilization. It is not everybody who feels this way only a select few but it brings questions to mind. Is it OK for one to consider themselves superior to another race?

Surprising we are not a stranger to this sort of attitude. Meaning that in our own country we discriminate against someone for what nationality they are, their education level, their social status. We distinguish our role models as multimillion dollar sports heroes or talented actors and actresses who complain about not getting millions of dollars more than they are currently getting paid.

Our country is a great country, don’t get me wrong on this, otherwise none of us would be living there. My point of this is how can we come over here and help a less than fortunate country without holding contempt or hate toward them if we can’t do it in our country. I try to do my part over here, but the truth is over there, United States, I do nothing but take.

Ask yourself when was the last time you donated clothes that you hadn’t worn out. When was the last time you paid for a random stranger’s cup of coffee, meal or maybe even a tank of gas? When was the last time you helped a

person with the groceries into or out of their car?

Think to yourself and wonder what it would feel like if when the bill for the meal came and you were told it was already paid for.

More random acts of kindness like this would change our country and our reputation as a country.

It is not unknown to most of us that the rest of the world looks at us with doubt toward our humanity and morals.

I am not here to preach or to say look at me, because I am just as at fault as the next person. I find that being here makes me realize the great country we have and the obligation we have to keep it that way.

(July Fourth) has just come and gone and I received many emails thanking me for helping keep America great and free. I take no credit for the career path I have chosen. I can only give it to those of you who are reading this, because each one of you has contributed to me and who I am.

However what I do over here is only a small percent of what keeps our country great. I think the truth to our greatness is each other. Purity, morals and kindness, passed down to each generation through example. So to all my family and friends, do me a favor and pass on the kindness, the love, the precious gift of human life to each other so that when your children come into contact with a great conflict that we are now faced with here in Iraq, that they are people of humanity, of pure motives, of compassion.

This is our real part to keep America free! HAPPY 4th Love Ya.

Marc Lee

P.S. Halfway through the deployment can’t wait to see all of your faces.

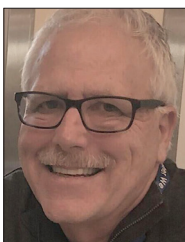
Lee was killed the very next month (August 2006). He was the first Navy SEAL killed during the war in Iraq. His story is shared in the book, “American Sniper” by Chris Kyle, the movie “American Sniper” with Bradley Cooper, and in one of his teammates books, “The Last Punisher” by Kevin Lacz.

*Jack James writes to highlight some of the veterans in this county, and as a form of education to the general public and reminder of the service, sacrifice, and sometimes fun of duty in the U.S. Military Services. Wallowa County has approximately 7,000 residents with more than 1,000 veterans. They are your friends, neighbors, workers and co-workers.*

## Making democracy work for all

## OTHER VIEWS

Scott Smith



What makes a democracy different is that it is a government run by the people, giving each person a say in how they feel through their vote.

Being a part of a democracy was decided by previous governing leaders and is often referred to as the best form of government and sets the United States apart from other governments.

The elements of a democracy consist of citizen rule, free elections, majority rules with individual rights, limitations on lawmakers and citizen participation. A democracy is built on the freedom to assemble, the opportunity to speak on information about changes to the government being proposed, equality and the right to vote.

It is important to remember and know

what the person running for office is representing and that a vote for that person’s views represents and aligns with yours as they will be representing your feelings and thoughts during their work in office. You should be focused on the policies and programs, not on the person(s).

The person you choose to vote for is the one who aligns closest to your personal beliefs on how and what should be done at the governing level. We are given that choice by our individual vote and others having the same values to govern our national, state and local governments.

We can build our children’s understanding of how the government works within our family. Having family meetings and allowing the family to discuss and vote on activities or meals for the family is one way. Give each a chance to speak and express their thoughts. Then take a vote.

Often when you vote the vote doesn’t go their way. This is part of democracy and the expectation is that you participate and accept the outcome of the vote. This is where the learning takes place and teaches your child the proper way

of dealing with a loss and accepting the loss. This helps our children build self-esteem and gives them the tools to deal with difficult situations in life.

As much as we wish we could always be winners that isn’t always the case in real life. But learning how to deal with loss and defeat at a younger age will build lifelong empathy and understanding and will help make our world a better place to live in.

As part of our democracy, majority rules. This is often difficult when the majority only wins by a few votes and there are strong feelings on both sides. This is why elections are held every few years depending on the position which provides the opportunity for the defeated side to build a stronger case and recruit more people to align with their side to become the victor in the next election. Until the next election, both sides are expected to work together for the good of the office and the people they represent.

*Scott Smith is a 40-plus year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.*