



Plight of renters faces legislators

Nevada is justifiably proud of its female-majority Legislature, but other states are passing progressive policy initiatives to address the critical needs of their citizens far beyond what is envisioned in our state.

For example, last week, Oregon became the first state in the nation to pass a mandatory rent control measure in response to an out-of-control housing crisis as people flock to the state looking for jobs and a new beginning. Proponents say the tenant protections are needed as people face rent increases of 100 percent or more and are forced to move in with friends, live in their cars, or accept deplorable living conditions on the street. Sound familiar, Reno?

Before you dismiss the idea as unworkable, consider that under the provisions of Senate Bill 608, landlords may not raise the rent more than seven percent a year above the annual change in the consumer price index. Landlords are also prohibited from evicting tenants without a reason once they've lived in the building for a year. Rent control is the best way to counteract

the greedy price-gouging many landlords can't seem to resist when demand rises. It's behavior Reno's renters know all too well.

In Oregon, Democrats hold the majority in both houses and passed the bill largely on party-line votes. Democratic Governor Kate Brown happily signed the legislation which takes effect immediately.

Oregon's Republicans denounced the bill, predicting that investors will flee the state, taking their development dollars with them, thus creating even less supply to meet the growing demand for housing. Utilizing the Trumpian "blame the Democrats for everything" approach, they accused their colleagues of causing the housing crisis by blocking the expansion of urban growth boundaries and raising the minimum wage.

But Jim Straub from the Oregon Rental Housing Association said the bill protects tenants and does not encourage landlords to take their money and run, indicating "most landlords will be able to adapt and operate within the parameters."

Other states are also pushing legislation

to address housing costs, as wages at the bottom stagnate and many are forced to pay more than 50 percent of their income to keep a roof over their heads. Besides rent control, solutions include better tenant protections, aid for middle-class home buyers, allowing tiny houses to be built in suitable backyards, and—gasp—new taxes on developers.

In Nevada, where we've historically favored landlords over tenants, our legislature is focused on smaller potatoes. Senate Bill 151 will double the time tenants have to protest "lightning" evictions from five to 10 days in response to our state's nationally-known practice of speedy evictions.

Washoe Democratic Sen. Julia Ratti, who has taken the lead on affordable housing legislation this session, also introduced an amendment to Senate Bill 103 to specifically authorize rent control measures enacted at the local level after municipal leaders told her they weren't sure they had the power to implement rent control. Ironically, the bill's main purpose is to reduce fees for developers who agree to include a few affordable

housing units in their new projects.

Nevada's realtors and apartment owners howled in protest at Ratti's amendment, small as it was, an offensive strategy that almost always works in Nevada to forestall real progress. Ordinary citizens could only offer heartbreaking stories of moving into their cars or sleeping on a friend's couch after being priced out of their housing. Ratti noted there is a 30-year waiting list for federally subsidized housing vouchers and insisted her amendment simply "enables local government to use every tool in the box as needed as part of the solution for affordable housing needs."

Instead of fighting for a clarifying amendment that is arguably not even needed, Nevada's legislators should look to solutions offered in other states and provide a heftier toolbox to help their struggling constituents. □

For more on this topic go to <https://tinyurl.com/y4t2mt83>

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