



Hostage-taking in a hot economy

You can sense the simmering anger

whenever the subject comes up, which is often in a city where 42 percent of residents live in rented housing. You can read about their frustrating circumstances in the comments section of news stories as people lament rent increases of 40 to 50 percent while noting their income has hardly risen at all, despite the much-heralded Republican tax cuts or all those new taxpayer-subsidized jobs. As one Twitter pundit sarcastically put it, “That trickle down will be coming any day now ...”

The Reno Gazette Journal reported recently that “43.2 percent of apartment hunters who reside in Reno-Sparks are looking to move to a different city,” higher than the national average of 29 percent. Tesla, Switch and other subsidized corporations have brought thousands of new residents to the Truckee Meadows along with surging rents, driving many local families downward in the housing market, effectively diminishing their quality of life while business boosters brag about their new wealth.

Everyone sees the problem, but those benefiting from Nevada’s corporate welfare claim the market will respond while also demanding even more tax credits or the elimination of sewer and impact fees as the price of their participation in building affordable housing instead of the more lucrative luxury housing aimed at the higher-income new residents.

Local and state government aren’t doing much to solve a crisis they created by giving away our taxes to attract corporations who hold us hostage to the promise of new jobs, offering platitudes and vague promises instead of engaging in a serious discussion about protecting tenants from no-cause evictions and huge rent increases or funding a serious expansion of affordable housing.

We need bold political leadership focused on helping those drowning in the quicksand of unbridled growth coupled with unsurpassed income inequality. Oregon’s legislature passed a mandatory rent control bill this year, limiting rent increases to no more than 7 percent, once a year. The

legislation was pushed by tenant advocacy groups across the state, fueled by personal experience of skyrocketing rents, no-cause evictions and housing shortages.

In Southern Nevada, Clark County Commissioners are funneling \$12 million a year from their marijuana licensing fund towards an array of housing solutions, from youth shelters to rapid rehousing of evicted families. The county plans to start building its own affordable housing units and fund renovations of existing housing stock while expanding mobile crisis intervention teams and community case managers to relocate people using a “housing first” model.

Back in Reno, you don’t have to look much beyond your local coffee shop to see the suffering. A friend of mine relayed his encounter with one family whose members congregate at his neighborhood Starbucks during evening hours to use the free Wi-Fi and recharge phones while the kids use the restroom to get ready for another night sleeping in the family car. Both parents work but were forced out of their 2-bedroom

apartment recently when their rent increased by \$600 to \$1700 a month. They don’t have time to wait for one of the 600 affordable apartments the \$10 million in tax credits approved by the Legislature is expected to produce statewide or a subsidized housing voucher that wouldn’t be enough to rent an apartment anyway. At this point, they might be better off moving to Las Vegas.

Reno needs an activist tenant association to harness the collective anger of our community and turn it into political power, becoming just as aggressive as the Nevada Association of Realtors—a group that argued vehemently in the legislature against the mildest movement towards balancing Nevada’s landlord-tenant laws. Furious renters have power, but only if they’re organized and ready to fight for their rights. Reno is their home too. □

For news on new landlord/tenant laws around the country, go to <https://bit.ly/31YbWaM>

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