



Law of the landlords

Campaign season often brings out the worst in people, and I'm not talking about the presidential race. Even though filing for state legislative races doesn't open until March, at least one organized interest group is already boasting about their \$2 million war chest and threatening to add to it to defeat candidates who won't jump on their train.

The Nevada Association of Realtors trumpeted their multi-million dollar campaign fund in an interview with The Nevada Independent to make it clear how mad they are at Senators Yvanna Cancela and Julia Ratti for daring to introduce legislation to help Nevada's renters get a fairer shake in a state that has long supported landlords over tenants.

When Senator Cancela tried to balance the scales a little through her bill to limit late fees and nonrefundable charges, the Realtors called it a "slap in the face" and killed the bill. When legislative leaders allowed some of the provisions to be added to another bill that passed on the final day of the session,

the Realtors aggressively lobbied Governor Sisolak to veto it. He refused, and renters won a small victory.

But the Realtors have continued to push back, predicting the new law would be disastrous, leading "to more litigation, fewer homes available for rent, and higher rents." But groups that supported the bill, like the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, say the new law has actually helped stabilize the rental market by producing fewer evictions.

Remember, we're not talking about mandatory limitations on rent increases as the Oregon legislature passed last year—although I wish we were. Our new law just says you can't charge an unlimited amount of money as a late fee in order to get rid of your current tenants so you can "renovate" and significantly raise the rent in a tight housing market.

Special interest groups have every right to support the candidates of their choice, but the Realtors' public threats of retaliation against any legislator or candidate

who supports tenants' rights is reprehensible in its positioning of "us" and "them." The Realtors told the Independent they intend to recruit and support candidates who are "aligned" with landlords and their goals. They want to "elect new lawmakers with stronger ties to the industry" so they won't have to deal with bills that forces landlords to treat tenants more fairly.

Beyond direct contributions, the Realtors plan to use their cash for third-party ads to attack the candidates they don't like and help the ones they do. They even had the gall to tell the Independent that they were determined they were "not going to be on the menu any longer." Really, they said that. As if the small tilt towards justice by slightly limiting abusive financial practices of landlords will put them out of business.

The Realtors are counting on their bluster to scare candidates into submission but that tactic isn't likely to work. I've never known a legislator who appreciated being publicly threatened, especially when promoting

legislation to help their constituents survive in a brutal housing market.

Senator Cancela tweeted her thoughts on the controversy, saying "As the only legislator mentioned by name in the article, let me be clear, \$2M doesn't scare me. If NV realtors want to work on housing policy, I'm in. I'm not interested in political warfare, I'm interested in quality affordable housing for *all* Nevadans."

Other legislators would be wise to send a message of their own and refuse campaign contributions from a lobbying group that is openly bullying elected officials and trying to intimidate candidates before filing even begins. Then let's put sound public policy that balances the needs of tenants and landlords back on the menu. □

Full disclosure: The Nevada Association of Realtors owns the building that houses both the Association and the Reno News & Review's offices. ... They're literally the landlords of the RN&R.

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