

Vote explanation on 1536

I voted no on SB 1536. Obviously people need to be able to cool themselves off during heat waves and I agree that landlords should not, unreasonably, stand in the way of this.

The problem, though, is that this bill will become a boondoggle for two main reasons: Our state has shown it is not the entity to rely upon in emergencies and this bill will make housing even more expensive.

I have near zero confidence that state government does anything “emergency” very well, other than declaring them. For example, after the consequences of the numerous COVID-19 Emergency Orders were becoming apparent, the direly needed emergency unemployment benefits and emergency rental assistance bills gave many Oregonians hope. For far too many, though, it was a false hope. Many did not receive timely assistance. Many received no assistance. Many had to make many, many attempts to even successfully connect with state government, meanwhile falling into homelessness or near homelessness waiting for this promised help.

Oregonians help each other when possible. It’s what we do. When it comes to a situation where our elderly neighbors or small children are in a precarious position, we reach out with compassion as individuals and families to make sure they have what they need. We should continue relying upon ourselves, each other and our communities; not on a bureaucratic, process-constrained, non-compassionate, inefficient big government program.

People should give a hand up and ensure that the vulnerable have a place to cool off but make it a local endeavor through neighborhood and community associations, or perhaps through city, and county governments. State government is neither agile nor responsive enough to be the answer to problems, including the one trying to be addressed in this bill.

The second main reason I voted against this bill is because it will add tens of thousands of dollars in additional costs to housing for renters who are usually more vulnerable to price pressures. If renters are reliant upon taxpayer funded subsidies, then this bill will necessarily increase public spending. If Oregon state government is mandating through this bill that all new rental housing is to be built with air conditioning, regardless of location, it is creating a one-size-fits-all and expensive solution, even where it may not make much sense, while also raising costs of “affordable” housing and costs to the taxpayers.

Besides the fact that this law will raise the cost of living in Oregon, the builders of these homes will likely be facing supply chain issues and higher prices for building materials impacting the practicality of implementing this part of the bill.

Also, I’m curious why the Oregon legislature is mandating installation of energy-eating equipment all over the state, while energy costs are soaring and while, at the same time, telling all of us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

These are some of the reasons I voted against SB 1536B, as well-meaning as it was intended.

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