



## HB 2436-A Affordable Housing Measure Floor Speech

### Opening

In brief, House Bill 2436-A will finish what we tried and failed to do in 2007—create a dedicated, ongoing revenue source to help some of Oregon’s most vulnerable citizens secure safe, affordable housing.

Oregon’s current economic downturn has made the need for more and better affordable housing more urgent than ever. Oregon is among the 14 states with the highest rates of homelessness in the nation. Our homeless population is currently estimated at more than 13,000 and on any given night, about 3,831 children experience homelessness. Contrary to popular perception, most homeless Oregonians are families with children. In my home county of Washington County, for instance, an estimated 86% of the homeless population falls into this category.

The current economic downturn has only deepened the need for affordable housing. A recent nationwide report compiled by the Homeless Research Institute revealed that for 2005-07, homelessness increased in Oregon overall by 8% and in rural Oregon by over 36%. Again, in my home county, Washington County Community Action has seen a year-over-year increase of nearly four-fold in calls for emergency rent assistance. The agency received 300 emergency rent assistance calls in January 2008; sadly, that number totaled 1,135 calls in January of this year.

The bill before us will provide relief for these Oregonians, notably, low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities. Modeled on legislation passed in several other states, including our neighbor to the north, House Bill 2436-A will increase the existing state-imposed document recording fee from \$11 to \$26 to establish a General Housing Account. This account, to be administered by the Housing and Community Services Department, will provide an ongoing, dedicated revenue stream to increase housing opportunities for Oregonians left behind by the housing market.

More specifically, this measure will leverage a current fee to create a new account dedicated to affordable multifamily housing, home ownership assistance for first-time home buyers and emergency housing services. This account will provide local agencies the ability to connect vulnerable Oregonians with the services they need, including:

- Emergency shelter and associated services;
- Programs designed to lead people from homelessness to housing and economic stability;
- Supportive services that enable people to continue to live in their own homes; and
- Individual case management that addresses the need for financial counseling, mortgage or landlord negotiation, or introduction of other critical health and behavioral services.

The account will be funded by a \$15 increase to the document recording fee pertaining to deeds and mortgage records filed with county clerks. Mining claims, warrants issued by the Employment Department, liens and judgment records, and the Department of Revenue will not be subject to the fee. The \$15 fee will be collected by counties for deposit into specified accounts within the Housing and Community Services Department for affordable housing-related programs. If approved, this bill will raise the current state-imposed fee on certain public documents by \$15 to a total of \$26 per document. The new fee will take effect 91 days after regular session adjournment *Sine Die*.

At present, House Bill 2436-A is projected to generate total collections of \$15 million in the 2009 – 11 biennium and \$26.5 million in 2011 – 13. The marginal increase in cost per transaction will have a profound impact on the lives of low-income Oregonians.

Homelessness presents extraordinary challenges. It is a complex socio-economic phenomenon that demands a thoughtful and permanent solution. This bill can be part of that solution and at the same time, put people back to work remodeling and building affordable housing across the state. That is why this bill is supported by a broad coalition that includes not only the 65 members of the Housing Alliance, but also the Oregon Bankers Association, the Oregon Association of Realtors and the Oregon Homebuilders Association.

That said, some may be reluctant to support this bill because of concerns expressed by a minority of county clerks. Let me dispense with this issue in short order:

- Firstly, the county clerks were unpersuasive in making their case for an additional processing fee to the balanced coalition that crafted this bill;
- Secondly, the county clerks' charge that they are insufficiently compensated has more to do with a range of fee exemptions imposed since 1999 than this particular bill; and
- Lastly, this bill will have no impact on the existing fees, which at the county level, include 50 cents to the county for any use; 50 cents to the clerk to cover expenses; up to \$10 in local fees for each document filed; and a potential \$5 per page charge for the general 'benefit of the county.' None of these fees will be affected by the bill.

Over a decade of tireless work has gone into this bill and at last, longtime advocates and their traditional opponents are united in support. Are we to risk its great benefits over a late and unavailing dispute? For our own sake as much as for the homeless, I hope not, because this measure promises not only material help, but lasting social progress.

Finally, House Bill 2436-A not only makes good on our moral obligation to Oregon's most vulnerable citizens, it also makes sound fiscal sense. Research suggests that the average annual public savings realized when ending an individual's homelessness is \$16,282 per year. And funding the Emergency Housing Account will allow Community Action Agencies around the state to leverage matching federal funds through various HUD programs.

A vote for this bill is a vote for putting home ownership in reach of more Oregonians and for making efficient and effective use of our tax dollars. I urge an 'Aye' vote on House Bill 2436-A.

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## **Closing**

I have waited patiently to hear what superior arguments might be leveled against this historic bill; but I have waited in vain. To my mind, none of the arguments heard today weigh against it with any notable might. As I said before, the county clerks have raised questions of equity we cannot settle in the context of this measure. I am sympathetic to their financial troubles, but submit this distress stems from multiple causes, few of which fall under our purview.

Of necessity, the homeless are absorbed in immediate wants, in provisions for the passing day; in obtaining the next meal; or in throwing off a pressing burden. The darkness of the present broods over coming years. For these Oregonians, this measure offers new hope. Hope in this sense means more than the simple sunny view that everything will turn out all right. It is the practical hope that comes with a safe, affordable place to call home. It is the hope that once your most urgent wants are met you can make the most of your small hour on earth.

Nothing and no one stands alone. The humblest person has infinite connections. We are joined by a shared origin, each existing for all and all for each. I see in this measure a chance to honor this bond—a bond more sacred, more enduring, than the ties of everyday commerce. I see in this measure a social duty to respect every soul. I see in this measure a rare moment in this broken time to do more than simply prevent things from getting worse, but to help repair the lives of the least and the last.

All of us have built on foundations we did not lay; lit our path with fires we did not spark; and profited from the efforts of those we did not know. This measure is our chance to give others similar tools and opportunities, to transform the great 'I am' into the greater 'We are,' and to stamp our state with a unifying faith and feeling. This measure presents a new way to make good on an ageless faith and I urge your 'Aye' vote on it.

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