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Summary:

A recent Metro public opinion poll of registered voters reveals that the top three concerns of local citizens are quite different from those on which elected leaders and political commentators often focus.

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“It’s not surprising that homelessness, housing, and traffic congestion rank as the top three issues in the Metro poll because these are problems most of us confront daily. They are also things we can take action on.”

Poll Shows Voters Are Smarter Than Politicians Think

By John A. Charles, Jr.

In November the regional government, Metro, released the results of a new public opinion poll of 800 registered voters living in the tri-county region.

One of the questions was, “In a few words of your own, what is the most important change that could be made to improve the quality of life in the Portland region?”

The top three responses were: dealing with the homeless/poverty (25%); affordable housing (17%); and traffic congestion (14%).

Environmental issues tied for last place (2%), and global warming did not even make the list.

This is roughly the opposite of what we frequently hear from many of the political talking heads. Listening to them, one would think that environmental Armageddon is upon us, especially because Donald Trump is President.

For instance, the top legislative priority for Senator Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who chairs the Senate Environment Committee, is a bill he hopes to pass in early 2018 that would create a \$700 million/year tax on carbon dioxide by establishing a convoluted industrial regulatory program. The ambient environment would not be improved one bit by this tax, but all of our basic necessities—food, clothing, shelter, and energy—would become more expensive.

Sen. Dembrow’s biggest supporter on this issue is Governor Kate Brown, who recently flew to Bonn, Germany to hobnob with celebrities at a United Nations conference on global warming. The two of them are convinced that if they can make energy more expensive, we’ll all use less of it and the world will be saved from “global warming.”

Most voters intuitively know that this is a scam. The term “global warming” doesn’t even have a useful definition. Voters know that the pain-versus-gain equation of global warming taxes is heavily one-sided: the “benefits” of reducing fossil fuel use are highly speculative (and may not exist at all); long-term (potentially thousands of years away); and global in nature. Yet the costs will be ***known, immediate, and local.***



As the Metro poll shows, there is very little grassroots support for this kind of punishment.

It's not surprising that homelessness, housing, and traffic congestion rank as the top three issues in the Metro poll because these are problems most of us confront daily. They are also things we can take action on.

Unfortunately, government itself has caused much of the mess, so voters will need to think carefully before signing on to more tax-and-spend programs. Almost every time regulators intervene in real estate markets, the result is some combination of less housing production and higher housing prices.

Take the most obvious intervention: urban growth boundaries. Since 1980, the population of the Portland metro region has increased by about 78%, but the available land supply for housing has only gone up by 10%. Making buildable land artificially scarce and thus more expensive is not a winning strategy if you're trying to provide more housing.

But lack of land is just the start. After you add in ubiquitous farm and forestland zoning, extortionist system development charges, tree protection ordinances, inclusionary zoning requirements, prevailing wage rules on public housing projects, and numerous other interventions, the result is that we have a serious shortage of housing.

Even the government is trapped in government regulation. Last spring the Portland City Council approved spending \$3.7 million to purchase a strip club on SE Powell Boulevard near Cleveland High School. The City plans to tear down the building and build 200 to 300 units of low-income public housing on the 50,000-square-foot property. City officials have admitted that it will take *two years* just to obtain the necessary permits for the redevelopment.

If it takes this long to get the permits for one of Mayor Ted Wheeler's top priorities, imagine the delays facing a private sector developer.

The housing woes in such cities as Portland, San Francisco, New York, and Seattle are mostly self-inflicted. Housing supply is lagging demand because we've created so many barriers to housing construction. Removing those barriers should be a top priority for the state legislature when it convenes in February.

Global warming legislation does not even deserve a hearing.

*John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of the Portland-based Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization. A version of this article was [published by the Pamplin Media Group](#) and appeared in *The Portland Tribune*.*

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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org