



Testing peace in politics

BY [JEFF GOLDEN FOR THE TIDINGS](#) December 30, 2018

This morning, one of the last of 2018, I find myself in Salem to learn my way around the Capitol. I'll remember 2018 as the year the people of the southern Rogue Valley handed me the honor and duty of representing them in the Oregon State Senate.

The weeks since the election have been full of meetings with people who want me to know their strong views on what our district and the state of Oregon need. You won't be surprised to hear that different people have very different ideas about that.

This preview of 2019 conflicts has me thinking with more focus about a question that followed me through the campaign: How do you steadily carry the values of peace, curious inquiry, and genuine respect for those who challenge you — the values that the Ashland Culture of Peace movement has been fortifying in our community for more than six years now — into a high-stakes arena where people are increasingly divided into suspicious, fearful, hostile camps? While we're all inspired by a few peaceful and loving warriors who swayed the course of history — Gandhi, MLK, Nelson Mandela — is it actually possible, in the cut-throat reality of today's politics, to live these values and make solid progress toward a better future?

These questions seem less philosophical to me as I take meetings with people who want very different things from the Legislature. One was with someone who owns a few rental units, a local guy I've known and liked for years. He knows that easing our state's brutal housing crisis will be on the 2019 agenda. He's heard about tenant protection proposals that would cap rent increases and regulate the terms of evictions. He tells me those are

terrible ideas, that meddling with the private rental market will end up hurting the people we're trying to help.

We'll hear this argument a lot from powerful Salem players in months to come. I wonder how it strikes legislators. Those I've met so far mostly seem good, public-spirited people drawn to politics to make life better for people. They don't like seeing thousands of unhoused Oregonians suffer, and most see how the crisis is seeding serious, costly problems down the road. So I expect us to do something this session.

But how much? Change on the scale we need will take some measures that landlord and real estate groups in Salem are likely to fight long and hard. What's then likely to happen is a watering down of legislation until it barely resembles the original bold proposals. This is partly about the clout of special-interest money, of course, but something more subtle is also at work. I've already picked up on a kind of dampening energy "inside the Building," where the need to get along and steer clear of intense conflict becomes stronger than the sense of urgency of the problem outside the Building. Now this is probably a more peaceful and mutually respectful process, at least for those with a place at the table, than pitched battles over strong legislation, but that doesn't do much — returning to the housing example — for the growing thousands of Oregonians who've lost or are losing a roof over their heads.

I met with a group of them recently, too. They took turns telling me painful stories of dislocation, insecurity and fear. One of them, a thin, exhausted-looking older woman in a hoody, had to leave early. She walked across the room to thank me for coming.

"This is the very first time I ever voted," she said unsteadily. "I did it because my friend told me you're somebody we can trust." She leaned forward to take my hand in both of hers. "Please," she whispered, "don't forget us. Please."

More than anything else as I take office, I don't want to forget her. Representing her in Salem the way she deserves, while representing a Culture of Peace day by day — that's a challenge with few models and no road map. As I do my best to meet it, I ask for your support.

Jeff Golden will be sworn into the Oregon Senate on Jan. 14. Beginning then he can be reached at Sen.jeffgolden@oregonlegislature.gov or 503-986-1703. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC

website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.