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My View: Salem Dems too lenient on property crime

 Joshua Marquis  Tuesday, February 26, 2019

Just last week, Gov. Kate Brown greeted attendees of the biennial Justice Reinvestment Summit in Salem with a rousing cry: She will withhold state funding from county district attorneys who do not lower the number of convicted felons they send to prison.

(<http://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003633942762-0644.jpg>)

Let me tell you what inappropriate touching feels like.

It's nothing like the prolonged hugs, the hand on the shoulder, the rubbing up against another person that is apparently rife inside the state Capitol building.

Inappropriate touching is when you come home from work and find that someone has broken into your home and ransacked the place.

Your late grandmother's jewelry — of no particular value other than sentimental — is gone, never to be seen again. The laptop you recently gave your daughter for her birthday — gone. The dresser drawers of her bureau have been pulled out, the contents sorted through and dumped on the floor.



CONTRIBUTED - Joshua Marquis

For the next hour, you'll think of an item and wonder if they (<http://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/000036339427> got that, too. Yes, the camera is missing. CDs, vinyl **0644.jpg** records, hiking boots, leather jacket, your old trumpet from high school marching band. Your daughter's bicycle parked in the utility room — gone.

As a former district attorney, over the years I heard victims compare burglary to what it must feel like to be raped.

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"I feel violated," they would say.

Yet lawmakers, obsessed with the lingering hugs and suggestive comments cited in an Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries report on sexual harassment, have no trouble dismissing the fear that comes from having the sanctity of your home invaded by strangers.

One of the most vocal lawmakers — state Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis — succeeded in driving one of her colleagues out of office for hugging her and touching her in a way that made her uncomfortable. Yet she joined with many of the state's Democrats in easing criminal sentencing of serious felonies — including burglary.

In 2017, she and many other Democrats voted to approve HB 3078, to reduce criminal sentences for property crimes.

Just last week, Gov. Kate Brown greeted attendees of the biennial Justice Reinvestment Summit in Salem with a rousing cry: She will withhold state funding from county district attorneys who do not lower the number of convicted felons they send to prison.

This governor gladly signed HB 3078 into law. She will ease off thieves, but she will go after prosecutors. Brown uttered not one word about the harm property criminals do to people trying to hang on to what they have.

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Many property crimes go unsolved. It's like kicking the victims when lawmakers grant virtual pardons to thieves who are finally caught.

One of the few times in my career that a jury came back smiling was in a burglary case I tried as a young prosecutor in Newport. The victim was a 25-year-old waitress who lived in a trailer with two cats. She befriended a man down on his luck and let him stay with her. He quickly became abusive. She told him to leave.

She came home one day and found that he had broken in, torn the place apart, killed both of her cats and smeared their blood on the walls.

The jury was happy to convict. The man got a 20-year sentence but served about two. That was in 1986.

Today, he could claim either a substance abuse problem or mental illness. He could be cut loose and offered services — courtesy of justice reinvestment, a concept embraced by lawmakers who flinch at an inappropriate touch.

Joshua Marquis served from 1994 through 2018 as district attorney of Clatsop County and served four years on the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. He can be reached at coastda@gmail.com (<mailto:coastda@gmail.com>)

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