

Why the Cost of Living Changes at State Borders — and Why Oregon Can't Ignore It Anymore

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Oregonians don't experience inflation in spreadsheets or policy debates. We experience it when rent goes up again, when gas costs more than it did last month, and when everyday expenses quietly stretch family budgets thinner.

We're often told these rising costs are unavoidable — the result of national or global forces beyond any state's control. But new federal data tells a different story.

If inflation were just a national problem, it would look the same everywhere. It doesn't.

According to a December 2025 analysis by the Council of Economic Advisers, states governed under different policy approaches are experiencing meaningfully different inflation outcomes. On average, states with long-term progressive leadership are seeing higher inflation than states governed differently — including in the areas families can least avoid: housing, energy, and transportation.

Across the country, liberal-controlled states averaged 3.0% year-over-year inflation, compared to 2.5% in conservative-controlled states. The gap widens in key household costs. Energy inflation was significantly higher in liberal states, transportation inflation was more than three times higher, and housing costs continue to climb faster where supply is most restricted.

This pattern isn't a coincidence. It holds true when states have a liberal governor, legislature, or when there is full state control of all governing bodies. In other words, it's not about one leader or one year — it's about long-term policy choices and their consequences.

Oregon is not exempt from this reality. As a state that has been under one-party control for roughly four decades, we are living with the cumulative effects of decisions that have often gone unchallenged. When the same leadership philosophy governs year after year, it doesn't just shape priorities — it shapes outcomes.

This isn't about assigning blame for the sake of politics. It's about acknowledging results. Forty years of one-party control means forty years of responsibility for what's working — and what isn't.

Good intentions alone don't lower rent. Compassion, without accountability, doesn't make life more affordable for working families. Policies that restrict housing supply, drive up energy costs, and limit transportation flexibility inevitably show up as higher prices — no matter how well-intentioned they may have been.

The lesson from this data is straightforward: leadership choices matter. Policy matters. And state borders increasingly mark where those choices change — and where costs change with them.

Oregon can remain a state that values fairness, environmental stewardship, and care for the most vulnerable while also being honest about what isn't working. Those goals are not in conflict. But they do require leaders willing to question old assumptions, challenge failed approaches, and adjust course when results fall short.

We owe Oregonians more than excuses. We owe them solutions grounded in evidence, humility, and a willingness to do better.

The data is clear. The cost of living crisis is not inevitable. It is shaped by choices — and it's time for new leadership in Salem willing to make better ones.