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Recommended Citation

Schorr, Natalie, "2024-01-31 The Problem With Portland's 90-day Fentanyl Emergency" (2024). *The Spectator Online*. 1177.

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The Problem With Portland's 90-day Fentanyl Emergency

Natalie Schorr, Digital Media Producer

Yesterday, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson declared a 90-day state of emergency in Portland to help combat the drug use problem in the city.

As someone from the Portland metro area, I'm doubtful that this will create any real change.

Back in 2020, Oregon voted to pass Measure 110, which decriminalized the possession of drugs. Many sources seem to point this out as the root of the problem Portland is facing now. Along with decriminalizing drugs, Measure 110 was supposed to create more resources to help people facing addiction. Instead of arresting people found with drugs, police officers are now supposed to give people referrals to get treatment.

But that hasn't actually worked out.

In actuality, Oregon has not invested the money needed to build more treatment centers and create more resources. In the outbreak of this news, I have also seen various news outlets report that the issue is that people are ignoring the referrals. It seems to me like people are assigning the blame in this problem to the wrong people. Instead of putting fault on the government organizations who were not creating resources, they say that people simply aren't taking the referrals.

I find it highly unfair to reduce this whole problem down to people not taking referrals for drug treatment. Firstly, not everyone who is addicted to drugs recognizes that it is an issue, or, if they do, they may not even want help. Secondly, even if they do want help, there are not enough resources in Portland to get them that help. I do believe that there has been an increase in fentanyl usage in Portland. But I also think that citizens are now being forced to see that issue firsthand, instead of police throwing these people in jail to forget about.

If you're wondering why there is a lack of proper drug treatment resources in Portland, it's not for lack of funding. If you make above a certain income threshold and live in the Portland metro area, you pay a 1% income tax intended to help fund resources to help unhoused individuals. My parents pay into this tax. Even with all this money, Multnomah County—the county where most of Portland is located—is not even creating a plan for how to spend it or effectively address the crisis.

All of this leads us to where we are now, with no real changes since the initial measure passed and more issues arising. The only solution we have come up with is declaring a state of emergency. Even with a state of emergency declared, the only plan seems to be



Jake Nelson

MDMA capsule. Fentanyl laced Psychostimulant overdose deaths in the United States have more than quadrupled over the past ten years according to the national institute on drug abuse.

to create a “command center” to address the issue. There doesn't seem to be a plan beyond that. Or a plan for what happens when the state of emergency is over.

I have long felt like the systems of government in the United States do not actually do anything to help the people they are supposed to represent. I think this state of emergency is a prime example of that. When are we going to stop with all this nonsense and actually help the people who need it? I love my home city, and I have seen firsthand what our government's refusal to help people has led to. I want us to find a real solution that will effectively address the problem, and I do not see this recent development doing that.

Maybe I'm just frustrated. Maybe I've read too many articles on the issue from sources I felt were poorly reporting on the subject. I want to see real change and real actions taken to combat a growing drug problem in my home city. Unfortunately, I can't see this state of emergency doing anything to actually fix it.