

## NOW THAT WE HAVE THEIR ATTENTION: THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE

### Congressman Earl Blumenauer

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**Bio:** Congressman Earl Blumenauer was born, raised, and educated in Portland, Oregon and has been an Oregon elected official for his entire career.

At the age of 23, he served in the Oregon State Legislature, playing a key role in enacting Oregon's landmark land use and transportation planning legislation. He also was elected to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and in 1986 was elected Portland's Commissioner of Public Works. As a member of the City Council and County Commission for almost 20 years, he championed programs and policies that led to Portland's acclaim as one of the nation's most livable cities.

Congressman Blumenauer went to Washington in 1996. From his seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, he has focused on making communities and families safer, healthier, and more economically secure. He is a member of the Bike Caucus, which he founded, the Task Force on Livable Communities, which he co-chairs, and the House Sustainable Development Caucus.

**Shelley:** I want to introduce our next speaker. Earl Blumenauer has been someone I've known for years, working tirelessly and very focused on these issues. Earl is a congressman from Portland. He's represented Oregon since 1996, and he founded the Bipartisan Bike caucus and the Livable Communities task force, which have really been instrumental in bringing the ideas that we're concerned into the heads of elected officials in Washington, and also linking back to what's happening in communities all over the country. This is absolutely not insignificant, this is a very significant effort that Earl has done. He's done it in a way that I think is a real example for all of us. Instead of being divisive in any way, Earl has reached out to many folks who have very different view points and different interests and come from a lot of different types of communities. He's been able to communicate to them that the issues of livable communities are at the heart of what people want to see. I think that's been absolutely critical to our success here and the way these issues are now on the national radar.

Please let's give him a big hand.

**Earl Blumenauer:** Thank you Shelley, master of understatement. I'm pleased to know that my efforts are not insignificant. What a way to start the day! But what can you expect from a woman who's given you a 3 by 5 card to evaluate this effort! Yeah, we know Shelley. Actually it's why I am here today.

As many of you know, at this moment, more than half way around the world, while some people's attention is focused on the tragedy drama in the Balkans, there's another event that's taking place that actually has more potential significance for world events. Because it's a new day in Indonesia in a couple of different levels, not just chronologically in their voting today, but it's the first free election that that country's had in a couple of generations.

I've done a little work there. I had to choose between being in Indonesia this weekend to monitor the elections, and being here. I made the choice, the conscious choice, to be here. In part because I was advised for the potential for disturbance, in terms of wrestling matches, if Peter and Andres really went at it, that there was an effort here that needed to be expended.

But because I truly believe that what we are doing here is not insignificant. That it really is at the core of what should happen in the political arena. As Charlie ran through that slide show I sort of felt a part of my life passing before me. Projects that I have been involved with or dreamed about or watched other people move forward for a long time. Things that I am proud of.

And to leave what I think is the best local job in America, in a city that I love, to go to Washington

DC to be absolute political pondscum. I went to Congress in a special election in a trigger of events that were triggered by Packwood's resignation and going in a special election I was number 435 in the seniority list in the minority party in a Congress that was absolutely polarized and at each other's throats.

But I was there because I am absolutely convinced that the federal government needs to be an aggressive, thoughtful, cooperative partner with you in making our communities more livable.

The federal government, notwithstanding what some of my goofy colleagues will talk about, in terms of - the stuff you're dealing with is local stuff and the federal doesn't have any role. But of course you know that that's absolute poppycock, that the federal government was involved with land use which we first started taking away land from native Americans and giving it to European settlers who were going to farm it and change those land use patterns. The transcontinental railroad, what we've done with water projects that have transformed the landscape, how we manage or not manage public lands, urban removal that was acknowledged earlier, more recently dropping interstate freeways, sort of a great idea in concept but carried to grotesque extremes, particularly as it was applied to metropolitan areas and urban areas without any sense of the context, without any citizen involvement, in some cases very perfunctory local interaction.

The federal government has been a partner, for better or worse, in shaping the design of our communities. And now it's time for the federal government to catch up with where the rest of America is going, in large part through the help of people like you in this audience. Because although we reference - and I will talk a few moments about the leadership of some of the people at the national level, like the people in the administration, the president and the vice-president - what we've seen in local communities however is really the driver.

The 200 local initiatives on the state and local level, the majority of which were successful. What we have seen, not just in goofy places like Portland, but when we you have the same sort of initiatives and tools that are available to give local communities decision making capacity and an idea of helping shape what they want their future to look like, places like Athens, Georgia and Salt Lake City actually come up with plans that look a lot like what we've done in Portland over the last 25 years.

And people who have their finger on the public pulse, for example recently elected Governor Barnes, in Georgia, Jesse Ventura from the upper Midwest, these people have been successful in the November election and in large measure they are reflecting some of the concerns that their constituents have about growth and development and where we're going.

Personally my career tracks this stuff. I'm a junkie, I'm unapologetic about it. I've got stuff in my bio I'm embarrassed to put. My first government appointment, when I was in college, was to the livable Oregon committee, by then-governor McCall, and I won't tell you how many years ago that was. I have been privileged as a legislator when we passed the land use laws, I was at a county that was the first major jurisdiction in our state to implement a comprehensive plan and I learned on the ground from very sophisticated citizen volunteers and dedicated professional planners about these concepts.

For ten years, being on the Portland city council was just a magnificent experience. This, for better or worse, is my life, and I don't pretend to be rational about it.

What I'd like to do is cover two areas and then seek a little bit of your feedback as I could, not so much on a 3 by 5 card Shelley but maybe a little interaction here and then, continuing this dialogue over the course of the next year, because I am profoundly interested in how you think this makes sense, what applications we need to make in your communities.

First let me tell you what I've done in Congress, because it does set part of the context. In the course of that three years, when you have nothing else to do in Congress, when nobody's going to listen to you anyway, when you have no significant committee assignments, you might as well do

what you want! Advice frankly that I would give to anybody in the political arena. I think it's better for your mental health and you might be surprised about what happens.

I set about, from my campaign, to the moment I was installed, to today, to be the spokesperson for livability in Congress. Some would say the spokesperson for cycling but.ahhh... it's part of it. Every week I'm on the floor of the House of Representatives either speaking on an amendment with a special order, even one of those goofy one minutes, referencing an issue of the day and how it fits with livable communities.

My legislative program, whether it's taxation, transportation, water, federal building policy or bicycles, is an attempt to craft issues that will make a difference in terms of livability and provide more tools for the federal government to be a good partner and for state and local governments to have the resources, the flexibility and the capacity to do that job.

We're working with the media. They are interested in this issue and I'm spending an increasing amount of my time in the care and feeding of the media, giving them information about issues, responding to terrible articles, trying to give some sense of current events with a livability spin to it. We're working with this administration. This administration is one of the most, if not the most, sensitive in the history of our country to the nature of this partnership and you've seen some of the initiatives that the president announced in his state of the union address. The vice-president has had a number of outstanding statements about these principles and continues to make it an issue.

We're working with the administration, the cabinet secretaries, the critical people in the agencies that are dealing with policy. And frankly I think Congress has a critical role to play to try and help people, particularly at the second and third levels of the administrative structure, to be able to take risks for livability.

We're attempting to work with people in local communities, sort of running around, kind of a livability Johnny Appleseed. I've been in over 40 since I've been in Congress, and trying to work with local congress men and women, either bringing them to Portland, going to their communities, increasingly trying to get them to understand that picking their shade of green with livability is important for service to their constituents, and candidly, for their political career.

Shall we reference groups that we've organized in Congress? There are in addition to the Bike-partisan Bicycle Caucus, which is kind of a fun way to address some of these issues, we do have a task force with over 50 members from the democratic caucus, meeting every two weeks dealing with issues of livable communities. We have a bipartisan caucus for sustainable development, and there is a bipartisan smart growth caucus in the US Senate. We're working to try and use as platforms to get out, not just to men and women in Congress, but even more critically, to the 20-something year olds that really run Capitol Hill, keeping them supplied with policy information and opportunities to interact.

We are working on the language and policy development and I'm experimenting at your expense, in your communities all the time testing things, stealing shamelessly from you whenever I can - keep your good ideas coming. We are working to try and reciprocate by being a local ally to you. Some of you have been pretty aggressive about using this service of my office, and I appreciate it, giving me articles that you think we need to be responding to, hooking us up with local talk shows, sometimes working with your local officials or businesspeople. Trying to be a local resource, so this is a two-way street.

And trying to deal with the politics, trying to make this a political issue. I've organized a Political Action Committee, a Committee for a Livable Future, that has made contributions to over 40 men and women running for Congress who are not ethically challenged, who have a chance of winning, and who get this stuff. It's been fun to be able to give someone like a Roxanne Pawls \$5000 for her campaign, tell her that she'll never hear from the people with this committee unless she wants some ideas about how her community could be made more livable.

That's my agenda. And I would welcome any feedback that you have at some point. But what I would like to talk about, and that is more important, is what is your political agenda. What are you doing to make this stuff happen? I have no patience for people who are exclusively involved in the ozone in a theoretical sense - some of that's fine, and I'm glad you have elements at these conferences and others that we go to, where you have people that deal on a theoretical basis. Because that helps provide the intellectual movement and energy. But doing that in the absence of some hard political spade work, building that physical citizen infrastructure, and fighting these issues out on the ground making them work politically, you're wasting your time.

The first thing I think you need to do is to be aggressive about building your political coalition nationally and in your local community. The other side is doing it. I get contacted every day from people that I don't know, about issues that I don't care about, taking up my time and that of my constituents. And they're pushing, they're organizing, they've got their political contributions, their lobbyists, their platforms, their conferences, and they're out there making things happen. A lot of stuff that happens doesn't need to happen, some of it shouldn't happen because they're more aggressive politically.

You have to care politically as much as the wingnuts and the whole host of folks - you can fill in the blank about who they are - and I can't believe that you don't care as much about your livelihood, about your community, about building livability, as some of these people that are using up an awful lot of oxygen in Washington DC, in state capitals, county commissions and city halls.

[applause]

You have to be as serious about building your platform and your coalition, and I think you can. I'm not going to talk about the international context right now because I don't have time, but it's there. People care about these issues in Bangkok and Brussels, and Bangor Maine. And there's a common language, and there's common opportunity, and there's something here we should talk about but I won't now.

Third point. Government performance is the single most powerful tool at your disposal. Making the government on the state level, the federal level, the local level, play by the rules to promote livability I think is the single most important key. The federal government has Bob [Peck] here - terrific guy. But he's fighting an uphill battle because the federal government despite the best intentions of this administration, doesn't have its collective act together in terms of how it promotes livability. I'm having great fun, some of you know, with a little post office bill, torturing the postal service with a law that would require them to obey local land use laws, zoning codes, environmental regulations...

[applause]

I was afraid for a moment it was going to pass last session. And we'd lose this valuable tool. I live in deadly peril, fear, that Al Gore and Bill Clinton are just going to make them do it, because it's such a valuable organizing tool to get the point across. That we don't need new laws, taxes, regulations and rules, if we could just get the federal government to do what it's telling you to do in your local community to protect the environment.

And for you to seize this issue as a blunt instrument and beat up every federal, state and local official when there's a hint of hypocrisy about this, will help you build your coalition, help you generate momentum, you will have righteous indignation, and you'll catch this wave, because we're going to win this battle in the next three years, and you ought to use it for your own selfish devices.

I'll guarantee you, people who would rather gargle formaldehyde than say the words "land use planning" —they get this. And it will help Bob [Peck] if you raise your voice to the federal government that has 60 portfolios of a million or more square feet across this country that they're going to be full partners for livability. It'll help him, and it'll help you.

Mr. Davis referenced the presidential campaign. By all means, get involved in the 2000 circus. I personally commend the vice-president for making this an issue. I do believe that he is doing his part. If you think Al Gore is your cup of tea you ought to tell him so, you ought to get involved, you ought to help him refine the message in his political people. Push back on the people that are trying to make this an issue against him by perverting what he's saying and trying to do.

For those of you of a different political flavor, make this an issue for your candidate. You will be doing him or her a favor. And these people are going to be running around for the next year trying to find air time, trying to look intelligent. For some of them it's more of a struggle than others. You can help them with one of the least toxic, most persuasive and important issues of our time.

For those of you who want to wait for awhile, organize local forums, particularly if you happen to be from New Hampshire, Iowa or California. Invite those presidential candidates in, or their surrogates. Have a livability forum. I would suggest that there may be opportunities for the Congress of New Urbanism to have some of your own forums for presidential candidates or their representatives.

Enough of that. You understand. You should have an organized strategy for college and university campuses. This is a source of amazing vitality and energy. You have college of environmental design, architecture, landscape, urban planning. You ought to be there, pumping that up, engaging them, the same way for anti-war and civil rights and environmentalism - you can do the same thing for livability on campuses across this country. I know from personal experience that the young people get it, they relate to it, they can be involved and you need to make that a part of your political agenda.

Do not ignore our friends in organized labor. There's an opportunity for a green-blue alliance. Livable communities have more union jobs, and they're more pleasant, not just for people in the construction industry or obvious people like transit workers in terms of mass transit and light rail. People like letter carriers and fire fighters are understanding that a livable community means more jobs for them, and it means that their employees are safer, and you need to reach out to them.

And those of you who are in the development arena ought to think about the potential of tapping into tens of billions of dollars of union pension funds for livable community projects. There's some terrific alliances that can be made.

There needs to be a stronger relationship I would argue with the environmental movement. Design professionals have some terrific ideas for saving salmon, for reducing greenhouse emissions, saving energy, protecting the water cycle, and I think you ought to be more aggressive in seeking them out and involving them. It's related directly to another area that's more academic but still should be on your radar screen, and that is developing the next round of environmental protections that are results oriented and performance driven, not regulatory and bureaucratic.

And you know lots of examples about how to bring that to pass. Speaking of examples, Bob and Shelley have asked for you to help them with ideas, barriers, impediments. I would suggest that you ought to think very carefully about coming up with your own examples of the post office bill. Some sort of micro policy that is so simple and so direct and so powerful that it will get the point across to the most hidebound opponent, the most obtuse person on the other side of this equation. You see them, I hear about them.

I had great fun when I went to Congress. Some of you know that I was mortified that I could give everybody who worked for me free parking, either in Portland or in Washington DC, and I couldn't take out of a million dollar budget a few bucks a month to subsidize somebody who wanted a transit pass. Although the federal government had been telling the rest of America to do this for ten years, even though many federal agencies were doing it, and Washington DC has allegedly the second worst traffic pollution in the country, air pollution, congestion, and we've tried to figure out how to revitalize DC. We had this 10 billion dollar metro system here. The people on my staff under 25 had a term for it, it was "Duh! Why don't we subsidize transit

passes?" It took two years but it was an excuse to talk to over 300 of my colleagues before the Republican leadership finally gave up and went ahead and changed the rules to we can do that now.

Little tiny micro policies can have devastating impact in getting your message across. Last but by no means least, get real about the politics. Don't allow somebody else to speak for you. Assuming that all the rest of America's political action committees, in their aggregate, are somehow going to work out to represent you and your interests. There's a reason why there was a so-called highway lobby, lots of good ideas turn south and go bad because people with special interests get behind them and push very very hard.

There are conservatively 250,000 design professionals that you probably have on your computer. At 10 bucks a month they will have a political fund that will be about what Tom DeLay is extorting from the business community for the year 2000 for the Republicans in the house. It'll be more than what the NRA has, it'll be in league with what organized labor is spending trying to prepare the battlefield. It's not an unrealistic task, and it would transform the arena in which you do business.

Hear what I said. You do business. Most of you make your living related to things that are at least tangentially involved with the livable communities initiatives. And in fact you will make more money if we spend our infrastructure dollars wisely, if we make it easier to finance mixed-use development, if we don't do stupid things with our transportation system. You'll make more money, have more professional satisfaction, and your communities will be better. It isn't just enough to be right and be well intended.

The American public does not agree with the NRA on provisions that deal with gun violence in America. In fact their radical views are actually embraced by only about 3 or 4% of the population, yet they have tied our Congress, our state governments, in knots, because they're focused and they care. Sadly I think they care more than some of the rest of us.

If you have trained yourself to be a professional, if you believe in creating livable communities, then you ought to care as much to create the political climate, the tools, the energy, to -

[abrupt end of recording]

Earl Bleumauer: —less deserving issues and individuals get resources and attention and pervert our statutes. I'm spending every week on a plane going some place, talking about this stuff, because I'm absolutely convinced that this is the time to make a difference for livability, and I am here and not in Indonesia because I'm absolutely convinced that those of you who cared enough to stay until the end of this conference, I know can make a difference in your community and nationally. I appreciate what you're doing, I appreciate the investment you're making, I appreciate the opportunity to share my biases with you.

With that Shelly I will stop, if there is time to interact with people I will do it, if not then I'll hang around and we'll chat for a moment later. Your call.

[applause]

Earl Bleumauer: Shelly has given me special dispensation. If there are two comments or questions that we can have now, we'll do it. If there's anybody who has anything to say, tell me who you are and -

Peter Katz: Peter Katz, good to see you Earl. I've just come out of a task force meeting where there was a lot of discussion about school size. And I know that groups like Educational Facilities Labs disseminate information if your high school isn't 50 acres you're just not happening. All over America towns are saying, goodness, we have to tear down nine of our ten school to comply with supposed best practices. Presumably your purview reaches into that area, and I'd love to hear you weigh in on that.

Earl Bleumenauer: You're right, the administration for example has a 5 billion dollar initiative for school construction. The extent to which we're able to get real about requirements and opportunities, I think there's a lot that can be done in that area, but I don't want to take our time on... you're right. It goes to government generally in terms of requirements for parking and location and there's a whole way that -

Peter Katz: [So you're saying] you just haven't hit that arena yet but you -

Earl Bleumenauer: We have been actually working with the educational community to try and get them more deeply involved with livability.

John Wetmore: I'm John Wetmore, I produce [Perils for] Pedestrians Television. There's been a lot of struggle in the last few years trying to get pedestrian advocates organized, they're well behind the bicycle advocates in most parts of the country... What's the role at the federal level - I want to write my congressman - what's the federal government doing where pedestrians are important where we should be trying to have an input?

Earl Bleumenauer: Pedestrians is a classic example. You ought to do what we've done with cycling, in terms of developing a little platform what makes a difference. You know that just as much as a cyclist, pedestrian is an indicator species of a healthy community, you know what you've got senior power - why should seniors have to go to malls to find some place where they can walk safely and attractively. There's a lot of person power you can unleash.

I think it is also - everybody in the transit trip ultimately is a pedestrian, the only question is how long between the transit ride, the car, the bus, are they a pedestrian. Sort of linking those allies, making it an issue for elected officials, organizing, proposing some things that are cost effective, making the alliance with the elderly, with people with mobility handicaps, with developers, with people who care about the urban landscape, with transportation advocates. If you sort through that, I think you have exactly one of the opportunities to be another one of these cranky forces that get in people's way, that are there -

In Portland, Charlie and I can talk - we made the mistake of funding them through the city, along with the cycling advocates and it made a huge difference in terms of making sure that they were at the party, they were heard from, and that they got a more appropriate share of the capital improvement budget. But that's a classic example of a group that's waiting to be organized, and in fact Ellen Vander Slys in Portland Oregon is trying to organize a national advocacy group for pedestrians, and if you want to get in touch with her I'd love to hook you up -

Jonathan Weiss: I know her very well.

Earl Bleumenauer: OK, thanks.