

Politics Is the Art of the Possible and Takes a Long Time

Nobody likes to hear that what they're experiencing as "unprecedented" has happened before. It's always slightly different and looks new but it's not really unprecedented. News may be shared through social media or in newspapers that live more online than in print, but the news itself could be reprinted from twenty, thirty, forty or ninety-five years ago.

Consider this *New York Times* article from November, 1990: "Real Estate Woes Seen Worsening – The slump in commercial real estate is almost certain to get worse before it gets better, real estate executives, bankers and other business people say... Unable to refinance their mortgages, many developers will walk away, forcing lenders to take over their properties. Other builders may file for bankruptcy protection."

On high interest rates, news used to be grim: "The Federal Reserve board led by Volcker raised the federal funds rate, which had averaged 11.2% in 1979, to a peak of 20% in June 1981. The prime rate rose to 21.5% in 1981 as well..."

Coverage of the George H.W. Bush era savings & loan crisis may sound familiar: "The cost, which seems to mount daily, will stretch out for decades. By one current measurement, paying for the collapse of the savings and loan industry could cost American taxpayers as much as \$500 billion, or about \$5,000 for every household. It is easily the biggest disaster in public finance since the Depression."

The Wall Street Journal in September 2008 – "Mounting Fears Shake World Markets As Banking Giants Rush To Raise Capital" – could have been cribbed from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in October 1929 – "Wall St. In Panic As Stocks Crash."

And *CNN* tried to explain part of the foreclosure crisis in 2008: "Government warned of mortgage meltdown."

None of this diminishes the extreme difficulty the affordable housing industry is currently facing, especially the severe economic struggles of rent stabilized buildings. Costly regulations are being imposed at breakneck speed without consideration of how to pay for them. Lending rates are hammering owners facing mandatory refinancing. Elected officials are intent on expanding a regulatory environment that continues to wreck both building finances and the city's budget while many communities are politically divided from one another. Government-forced disinvestment in aging buildings is being celebrated by those who claim to represent those who are then negatively impacted by worsening conditions.

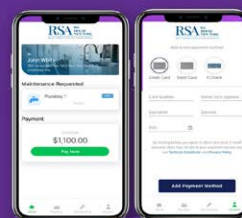
It's our turn at the edge. And like earlier generations who tackled crises, we need to lead and bring the changes necessary to correct this downward spiral. We do this by acknowledging the situation as it is, not how we want it to be. We do this by being steadfast in the face of doubters with no sense of civic history. We do this by building coalitions because it's too big a job to do alone.

RSA's diverse members work and live in every neighborhood. We look like our tenants and mirror the city's growing diversity. Recent immigrants from South America will be tomorrow's owners, just as arrivals from China, the Caribbean and Balkan countries were after waves of Irish and Italians and Eastern-Europeans. Owners of color continue to build thriving communities throughout the metropolitan area. All of these owners are the leaders – together – who will help solve the crisis we're now in.

It's never easy but it's always doable. It takes politics, lawsuits, building a record of economic data and studies, showing up, proving testimony at hearings, philanthropy, and joining government when appropriate and opposing it when necessary. It takes constant attention to the grind that's always difficult and rarely glamorous at the level of city and state agencies, community groups and local developments. We do this important work because it's the work our families did before us.

This July / August issue of the *RSA Reporter* covers recent work in city and state government and politics. It's all worth doing because it all contributes to a recovery that can only happen with our participation. ■

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