

Just another Crazy Idea to End Homelessness

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AN ARTIFICIAL CRISIS - Something doesn't make much sense to me that our major metropolitan areas, all with tens of thousands of homeless people on their streets, would simultaneously have four to five empty housing units sitting vacant per person for everyone sleeping outside.

This is not just a Los Angeles problem, or a California problem, but a problem that is spread across the entire nation, with similar statistics in nearly every city you look at.

We have on average six million people in this country, who are either homeless or living with serious housing instability, while more than 18 million housing units sit empty from coast to coast. A great many of these are simply used as tax deductions for investment firms run by billionaires, the same billionaires quite often who are charging sky high market rate rents in these new developments going up on practically every block.

Basically, using an artificially created housing crisis (which is truly an affordability crisis) to justify charging upwards of \$3,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment. A crisis they created, in order to enrich themselves.

Here, in Los Angeles County, we are faced with 60,000 people homeless on the streets, while 231,000 housing units remain vacant. This is simply unacceptable.

Today, calls for a vacancy tax are making their way through the chambers of LA City Hall, but that is not enough. Yes, we need to put a financial penalty on bad faith landlords, but moreover, we need those units to put people in them.

Back in 2009, a decade ago, LA County completed Project 50, in which they simply housed the 50 worst cases of homeless individuals they could find, with the supportive services they required. The program was a huge success – a 98% success rate, saving the County \$21K per person over what it would have paid to keep them on the street. It was so successful that they wanted to expand the program to Project 500 and beyond, but then the County Supervisors suddenly ended the program's funding, even though the program itself was saving the county money. See this LA Times article to know more.

For me, the reasoning behind the sudden change of direction is pretty obvious. The powers that be, behind the scenes, looked at how successful and cost effective this program was and suddenly realized that all the savings were being made in their police, sheriffs and emergency services, which meant that effectively ending homelessness would mean that the county, and eventually the entire state and country, would have no choice but to cut their police budgets, for the excess funds would no longer be necessary or justifiable.

Let's face it; homelessness is the bedrock that keeps the entire system of cruelty in place.

Without homelessness, they wouldn't be able to siphon off billions of dollars out of our communities, from our other vital public services like health care, education, transportation and food stamps; they wouldn't be able to gut our middle class, while stealing the land right from under us with massive development projects that only serve the rich and their multi-national corporations. Without homelessness, and the threat it poses to the next generation, it is sure that they would also stop being able to fill the ranks of soldiers to die in all these meaningless, endless wars.

So here's a crazy idea for you. How about we just take what has already been proven to work and implement it fully, so that no one is left without a place to call home and we can restore a little bit of sanity to the American way of life?

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