

Letter: Gitlin's cure for homelessness is out of touch with reality

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In an age of deliberate disinformation, fake news, and digital information illiteracy, local media outlets carry the distinct responsibility of edifying an electorate independently of the competing echo chamber narratives pushed by conspiracy theorists, political consultants, advertisers, and the financial interests of media conglomerates.

This is why I believe it was a poor choice for the Triplicate to provide a platform to amplify the ramblings of Roger Gitlin. I'm frankly a bit perplexed as to why any reputable publication would hand him a megaphone, given his public record of statements ranging from demonstrably false conspiracies to remarks dusted with thinly veiled prejudice.

In Gitlin's April 22 guest column, he asserts that cutting off the "gravy train of free stuff" is a cure to homelessness "that works." Of course, he cites no tangible evidence of this plan's efficacy. The only proof offered is the insistence that Red states don't seem to suffer these social ills on the same scale.

Conveniently, at no point does Gitlin's column take each state's cost of living into consideration as a contributing factor to their respective unhoused populations. This perspective is completely out of touch with the reality of so many Californians who are currently struggling to afford safe and adequate housing.

Average rental costs have spiked disproportionately to the average wage, and even solidly middle class families are struggling to attain home ownership. It is ludicrous to ignore this very real hardship and its direct connection to homelessness.

According to the narrative pushed by tax-dodging special interest groups (perfectly parroted by Gitlin): poverty, addiction, and mental illness are moral failings that can be magically cured by a job. Never mind the fact that poverty, addiction, and mental illness all serve as barriers to maintaining employment.

This tired talking point also ignores the existence of individuals who are disabled and cannot perform traditional full-time work. While Mr. Gitlin admits that “a tiny number” of folks may have slipped through the cracks, the reality is, CDC data shows that approximately 26 percent of Americans have some form of disability. Those who can work may require supports to do so, which are in part provided by these social programs that Gitlin aims to vilify.

It is impossible to pull yourself up by the bootstraps when you don’t own any boots. Gitlin’s advice to simply “Work. Break a sweat.” doesn’t actually help anyone who is struggling to secure housing. Not in an age when rent costs more than workers’ wages can afford.

What I imagine Gitlin and I can agree on is the absurdity of an economic system wherein average working class people have a better chance at securing food, shelter and medicine through relying on state aid than through the earnings of their labor alone.

I imagine most of us would agree that reforms are certainly necessary in many areas. However, reducing an issue as complex and nuanced as the current housing crisis down to a matter of personal moral failure is lazy. This argument only serves to shift blame away from the greed and corruption that plague our economic and political systems, while dehumanizing those who suffer the most as a consequence.

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