

Rent control is ‘a ludicrous idea,’ and so is blocking housing

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For the third time in four election cycles, Michael Weinstein is using the AIDS Healthcare Foundation’s (AHF) money to try and attack apartment owners.

Weinstein says he wants to do this to protect renters – despite being labeled a slumlord himself by the Los Angeles Times because of the condition of the properties AHF owns.

AHF and Weinstein’s political tactics have been so caustic that the foundation has lost millions of dollars in grants and contracts from the state and federal government.

So, the notion that Weinstein has any “strange bedfellows” as Politico reported this week is a stretch. But not as much of a stretch as their article’s title – “Republicans... for Rent Control?”

Housing is a non-partisan issue – this is not about which party supports what policy because any honest politician knows that supporting rent control is merely pandering to constituents who call for the policy. Historically, it is a disastrous approach to affordability.

It does not produce any more housing – in fact, the opposite, as Minneapolis recently found out and had to amend their laws to try and encourage housing development.

It does not curtail the demand for housing – as populations are still growing.

It does not make housing any more affordable – California rents declined everywhere last year – except in rent-controlled communities.

It does not assist those in need – the blanket approach to housing policy ends up keeping rent-controlled units in the hands of those who know how to take advantage of the laws. Ask Berkeley how many professors “live” in rent-controlled units during the week only to go back to the houses they own in exclusive communities like Marin, Tahoe, and Monterey on the weekends.

However, that is not what Politico focused on, it is not what Weinstein cares about, and it was not what council member Strickland said – which they even included in their

story: “Statewide rent control is a ludicrous idea, but the measure’s language goes further. It gives local government ironclad protections from the state’s housing policy and therefore overreaching enforcement.”

Strickland goes on to explain that the city’s interpretation of components of “The Justice for Renters Act” removes the state’s ability to force the city to build housing if they impose steep affordability requirements on housing.

These requirements, presumably, would be so steep that building new housing units is not financially viable. The result being developers would look elsewhere to create new housing opportunities.

Intentionally using the state’s laws against itself in a way that prevents housing from being built just to prove a point may score points for partisanship, but it will hurt Californians.

The housing crisis in California will not be resolved with sound bites. Housing affordability can’t be achieved with regulatory burdens that make it harder to build more housing.

California’s ability to solve these issues will only come when our elected representatives are pressured to address the problems that exist first.

Admittedly the back-and-forth gotcha approach to housing policy can be entertaining to watch.

However, Californians need to prioritize long-term vision over short-term gains and value real-world growth over theoretical power struggles to create viable and sustainable housing policies.