

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

September 2-8, 2021

LET THE BOONDOGGLE-BUSTING BEGIN! – Part 16

*this is the first time
monterey's dance troupe performs
without its leader*

*in january
Carol Tefertiller died
from covid-19*

*the tap bananas
help kick off free seniors day
thursday at the fair*

*dance is metaphor
despite changes life prevails
the show must go on*

Photo by Keith Brown



AFTER THE RECALL, WHAT KIND OF HOMELESS SHOW WILL GO ON?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

PREDICTING the future is how news is concocted and sustained. If California's Governor, Gavin Newsom, had known in early 2020 what he knows now, would he have changed his State of the State address on February 19?

By mid-March, the nation was going into shelter-in-place lockdowns, from which California began emerging on June 15, 2021, just as whimpered calls for recall of the governor rose into a threatening roar. Voting is still under way.

Regardless of who emerges as governor of California on September 14, these excerpts from Newsom's 2020 State of the State speech focus the spotlight on our Golden State's stage of life and will determine fate of all California's sheltered as well as 2021 homeless populations.

Collectively, that's the *vox populi*! Voices like yours and mine!

Thus Spake Governor Gavin Newsom:

...no amount of progress can camouflage the most pernicious crisis in our midst, the ultimate manifestation of poverty: homelessness... Let's call it what it is, a disgrace, that the richest state in the richest nation — succeeding across so many sectors — is failing to properly house, heal, and humanely treat so many of its own people.

Every day, the California Dream is dimmed by the wrenching reality of families, children and seniors living unfed on a concrete bed. Military veterans who wore the uniform of our country in a foreign land, abandoned here at home. LGBTQ youth fleeing abuse and rejection from their families and communities. Faces of despair. Failed by our country's leaders and our nation's institutions.

As Californians, we pride ourselves on our unwavering sense of compassion and justice for humankind — but there's nothing compassionate about allowing fellow Californians to live on the streets, huddled in cars or makeshift encampments.

And there's nothing just about sidewalks and street corners that aren't safe and clean for everybody.

The problem has persisted for decades — caused by massive failures in our mental health system and disinvestment in our social safety net — exacerbated by widening income inequality and California's housing shortage.

The hard truth is we ignored the problem. We turned away when it wasn't our sister, our brother, our neighbor, our friend. And when it was a loved one, help wasn't there.

Homelessness As A Pang Of Guilt, Not A Call To Action

Back in 2005, when we started our point-in-time counts, there were over 188,000 homeless people in California — 35,000 more than we have today. Even at that peak, the state didn't treat it with the urgency required.

It became normalized. Concentrated in skid rows and tent cities in big urban centers. Now it's no longer isolated... No place is immune. No person untouched. And too often no one wants to take responsibility.

I've even heard local officials proclaim in public: it's not my problem. Servants of the public too busy pointing fingers to step up and help? That's shameful.

After all, every homeless Californian, living on a boulevard of broken dreams, is a casualty of institutional failures — a person who's fallen through every possible hole in the safety net.

Homelessness impacts everyone, but not equally. Some communities have been hit much harder.

Urban renewal and gentrification broke up communities of color and throttled their abilities to move into the middle class.

Systemic Issues Rooted In Poverty And Racial Discrimination

The State of California can no longer treat homelessness and housing insecurity as someone else's problem, buried below other priorities that are easier to win or better suited for soundbites. It is our responsibility. And it must be at the top of our agenda...

We've got to replace California's scattershot approach with a more focused, crisis-level response.

To meet this moment with the commitment it demands, we're committed to advancing a new framework.

We will reduce street homelessness quickly and humanely through emergency actions. We will be laser-focused on getting the mentally ill out of tents and into treatment.

We will provide stable funding to get sustainable results.

We will tackle the underproduction of affordable housing in California. And we will do all of this with real accountability and consequences.

First, we've started with emergency actions to do everything we can now... After decades of neglect and inadequate responses, we are putting our entire state government on notice to respond with urgency.

Governor Newsom's January 2020 Executive Order

Last month, I issued an Executive Order deploying emergency housing trailers and services for homeless families and seniors... That same Executive Order builds on our work last year to identify all excess state land. Today, we are making 286 state properties — vacant lots, fairgrounds, armories, and other state buildings — available to be used by local governments, for free, for homelessness solutions... We have also directed Caltrans to make better use of other unoccupied spaces to get homeless housing up as fast as possible. . . we established a Strike Team across many agencies, including Health & Human Services, Caltrans, and the CHP — all with one goal: to break through bureaucratic barriers.

We need more housing, not more delays. We are also pushing for new models of homeless housing — like hotel/motel conversions and pre-fab and tiny homes — and as we do, we'll cut the red tape to get to 'yes' on these innovative approaches. While we take emergency measures to increase shelter and services, we must also comprehensively address the hardest part of this problem: The chronically homeless — those out on the streets for more than a year, with complex behavioral health needs.

Boondoggle-Busting In A Nutshell

In a politically polarized world, liberals and conservatives blame one another for these failures.

Historically speaking, both are right. It's time to stop pointing fingers and join hands in a transformational solution... It's time to match our big-hearted empathy with tight-fisted accountability... Nimble and flexible to evolve from best practices to next practices...

Based on the severity of the crisis, we need early legislative action to set up the legal authorities to enter into contracts with service providers now — not waiting until months from now — because we don't have months. . .

I'm old enough to remember when HUD was in the housing business. And I'm hopeful, one day, they will be again... After all, homelessness isn't a blue or a red issue. It's an everyone issue — a blight on the soul of America...

*I don't **think** homelessness can be solved.*

*I **know** homelessness can be solved. This is our cause. This is our calling.*

Let's all rise to the challenge and make California stand as an exemplar of what true courage and compassion can achieve.

Let's get to work."

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Less than a month later, Covid-19 stole the political spotlight, but didn't steal Governor Newsom's thunder. To read his dynamic 2020 State of the State Address, allow yourself about eight minutes and visit:

[Newsome's 2020 State of Homelessness Address](#)

If above link doesn't work, copy-and-paste this full link into your address bar:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/02/19/governor-newsom-delivers-state-of-the-state-address-on-homelessness/>

Meanwhile, as part of Governor Newsom's "California Comeback," the Tap Bananas, Monterey Recreation Department's troupe of senior tap dancers, will help kick off the 2021 Monterey County Fair on Thursday, September 2, 2021, at 2:00 PM.

It will be our first appearance without our late leader, Carol Tefertiller, who died in January of Covid-19. Gates open at noon. Seniors age 62+ and veterans will be admitted free. The event is sponsored by Aspire Health Care. The Tap Bananas range in age from 60 through 95 (I am 86). For details on the Fair's new "clear-bag policy," see <https://montereycountyfair.com/>.

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CREDITS:

Photo courtesy of photographer Keith Brown and reprinted from original poster with permission of The Tap Bananas.

Book: *The Boondogger's Bible - How to Fight Like City Hall to Win!!* (\$17 from Wanda Sue Parrott, P. O. Box 1821, Monterey, CA 93942-1821) or from amazon.com.

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