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To: LA City Council Mayor

Testimony -

L.A.'s Homelessness Becomes an International Embarrassment



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Yesterday's UN tour of Skid Row was a warning to Mayor Eric Garcetti and City Council President Herb Wesson in the same month that Garcetti cheerily tours the U.S. to promote our Olympics facilities and Wesson pushes a tiny affordable housing fee on developers that won't make a dent in the crisis.

UN Monitor Philip Alston's tour of L.A. encampments is a wakeup call. Garcetti's and Wesson's failure to address L.A.'s worst humanity crisis since the 1930s Depression is global news. Alston, an Australian and a New York University law professor, yesterday said, "Politicians in any context are there to put a positive spin on what they're doing and to insist that existing problems are about to be resolved."

Garcetti and Wesson have allowed a worsening situation to explode:

- No units of homeless housing have been erected since voters approved \$1.2 billion in HHH funds a year ago. Garcetti and Wesson did not enact emergency plans to free funds and counteract bureaucracy.

- Garcetti and Wesson did not reign in costs through emergency or creative means, allowing the price per proposed homeless unit to hit \$430,000. At that cost, L.A. could put its homeless suburban houses.

- Garcetti and Wesson are mired in band-aid thinking that won't make a dent. Key among them is the misguided "affordable housing linkage fee," to be debated by City Council tomorrow, Dec. 13. **THE PUBLIC CAN WEIGH IN at 10 am Weds. City Council Chambers.**

- Garcetti is papering all this over with smiley-face media moments — on Dec. 4 he touted 8 new toilets for the homeless, an embarrassment in a city enjoying a prodigious tax and revenue boom. Skid Row activist General Dogon is right (watch the video).

Michael Weinstein, president of AIDS Healthcare Foundation, which has jumped into the affordable housing market to help get the sick off of the sidewalks, has pledged to open units that cost one-fifth of what the city plans to spend, staying below \$100,000.

"The lack of urgency around homelessness is now a scandal of international proportions," Weinstein said.

Rev. Alice Callaghan, who has dedicated her life to families on Skid Row, said, "Did anyone tell the UN Monitor that we have gone from 9,000 beds to 3,000 beds for the homeless? As of now, the only answer is as many tents as possible. We must have tents."

"Angelenos demonstrated a strong commitment to ending homelessness in their vote, and are willing to pay for it," said Jennifer Friedenbach, the respected Bay Area executive director of Coalition on Homelessness, "It's imperative that acquisition of sites and buildings happen immediately."

It is not happening, even today. Garcetti and Wesson need to get with the program, focus on the problem, and put their pet projects aside for the sake of human decency.

We urge Angelenos to attend the City Council debate Dec. 13 on a proposed fee that lets world's richest commercial developers pay a tiny cost to counteract the displacement and gentrification they are fueling, which causes homelessness. "The UN chose to tour L.A., a city whose elected officials expect us to be proud that we supplied 8 toilets," said Coalition Executive Director Jill Stewart. "Let's admit L.A.'s emperors have no clothes."

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