

LETTERS

Senator Backs Rent Controls

Dick Turpin's column (Oct. 24) makes it seem that California's rental housing crisis is primarily a crisis for landlords, not for renters. The column distorts the history of rent-control efforts by suggesting that rent control leads inevitably to housing abandonment and urban decay. Recent evidence about the impact of rent control shows that the fears of landlords are based largely on myths.

Rent control does not necessarily hinder the construction of new homes. According to a state-commissioned study in Massachusetts, the rate of increase in new construction of multi-family units in rent-controlled areas actually exceeded the rate of increase in new construction in the same areas prior to rent control. Similar conclusions were drawn by recent studies of rent control in New Jersey and Miami Beach, Fla.

The Massachusetts report found that rent-controlled areas shows a greater increase in the number of new multi-family units than did non-controlled rental areas. Multi-family units increased by 54% in Massachusetts rent-controlled areas between 1971 and 1973, while the increase in noncontrolled areas was only 39%.

Turpin's column suggests that abandonment results inevitably from rent control. New York City's housing crisis is often cited by opponents of rent control. However, according to the National Urban League's recent nationwide study of housing abandonment, five big cities which did not control rents had even worse abandonment rates than New York's. Obviously, factors other than rent control play a major role in the abandonment of urban housing.

New York and other aging East Coast cities are in bad shape. However, the facts lead to the conclusion that one must look beyond rent control to find the real causes of the housing shortage. If a city's housing stock is declining, one should also examine other factors such as the age of buildings, interest rates, availability of mortgage loans, public policies encouraging the escape of middle-class families to the suburbs, and local redevelopment decisions which have the effect of destroying existing low and moderate-income urban neighborhoods.

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