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I Have Some Questions for the Democrats Who Want to Run California

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By Jack Nicas

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mentioned found that it takes about 27 months to complete a multifamily housing project in Texas, 27 months to complete it in Colorado and 30 months in California. Why does it take so long here, and what would you do about it?

Kate Porter: First, I love that you're talking about this RAND study. It's very important. It's very important to me personally, even when we were asked, essentially: What makes conservative cons tagine? And I think some people still haven't read the study ……

You believe that?

Porter: I have read the study. We got asked about it before, and nobody had read it, and it doesn't seem like they have since. The study is very, very clear that the speed is the driver.

Now, that's not to say there aren't a lot of things that were mentioned that contribute to the speed.

But if we could be 22 months faster, which is what Colorado does – and Colorado is a conservative state, and they have the same market standards — then the estimate are we could take off at even 20 percent off the price, and that was market rate.

So, yes, we need more housing, but more housing is a tool for less expensive housing.

I think it's really important to think about all the different tools in your tool kit. I strongly support the pending legislation that would create an uniform statewide permit, making it easier for everyone to have the same permit, easier for the state to monitor these projects.

I also think it's a really good idea to limit how many last-second add-ons can come. If you're a city and you get a permit, you should have 30 days — that's the proposal in the Legislature — and, you could argue, it could be 45 or 60 days to say: This is what the fees are going to be. This is your contribution for seven. This is your contribution for school.

And then you cannot do what we see now, which is just a little bit more and a little bit more and a little bit more, which is a little bit more and a little bit more and a little bit more — until pretty soon the project is unaffordable.

Those are just a couple of ideas.

I also do think there are innovations in architectural design, particularly for multifamily, that could be really helpful — especially smaller multifamily, where we're seeing things that are four units here to apply the same standards, essentially, as something that's 400 units.

That also adds to the time unnecessarily without providing much benefit of those smaller unit projects, which we need a lot of.

Yes, we need all of the big stuff, too, but we've got a lot of different opportunities. We need to look at the different opportunities in different ways. But they all need to do it much faster because time is money.

There's a difficult irony you see not only in that study, but it comes up again and again in my own housing reporting: There is no free lunch. Adding more regulations, adding more fees, adding more amenities makes that affordable housing, affordable housing costs more to construct per square foot than market-rate housing does.

When you look at that same study that we are hoping up here on the stage, what you see is that it costs twice as much to construct a square foot of market-rate housing in California as in Texas, and that the difference in the square foot of affordable housing on market-rate housing is Texas.

That affordable housing is being built partly on the public dime. Why is it so much more expensive here to do affordable housing than market rate? And what do you do about it?

Porter: This is not a surprise, because affordable housing projects face more delays. They face more obstacles. They face more community resistance. They face more restrictions on zoning. People don't necessarily want them in a lot of our communities.

The other piece of this is that land becomes more expensive. Every land parcel, people are worry about whether something is going to come, the cost goes up.

The other issue is that affordable housing developers are paying together financing from seven different pools of money that are all designed to make a contribution, and you just as soon get the second thing and you're ready to go, the seventh one expires or you lose that funding or someone changes the term of a program.

So one consolidated, bigger pot of money, which is more similar to what market rate is using — they're going to Wall Street, they're getting the money, and they're using it — one consolidated pot of money would help.

The other thing in the state should be putting land up for affordable housing. That is one of the major factors. It's one of the hardest ones to solve. You can actually solve labor by my going backward on housing and labor policy, which the other candidates both have.

I think we might be trying to drive down the cost of construction, but the land is a tricky piece.

The state should contribute land for affordable housing.

When you say the other candidates are going backward on labor, what do you mean?

Porter: I have said that I do not think today or now is the time to repeal prevailing wage requirements. I'm not in favor of that. The Labor Vote2 was the only candidate — Jerdon or Bert Mickey — I don't believe you were in front of the Labor Fed, so I just want to make it clear.

But at those at-who were in front of the Labor Fed, I was the only one who said: I'm not doing skilled and trained to bid today for residential housing, because it's going to drive up the cost.

[Audience applause.]

Hold to the end.

And I took the heat from labor. I stood up to labor. Lorena Gonzalez was right there.

I am not scared of anybody because I've got three teenagers that I do not want living on my couch.

And you all some very lovely, but I don't want you living on my couch or a street corner or in someone's attic. I want you to all have housing where you can flourish.

There is a pathway to keep building that work here. There is a big piece of that that is about making sure we have apprenticeship and labor practices, which unions have often been very helpful at doing.

You could also do that through actually having government oversight of wage violations and work force violations, and that would be my approach.

Thank you, Ms. Porter.

Mayor Mahan, but Ben has been able to approve over 20,000 new homes for construction, most of which did not get built because the economic crisis hit shortly after.

What could Sacramento do to get those 20,000 homes built?

Matt Mahan: Well, thanks for doing this, Ezra. There's so many important issue. Just want to say, good evening everyone. It's great to be in Oakland. Thank you all for coming out and being pro-housing.

This issue is very personal for me. I grew up in a house remodeling my parents argue about how we were going to pay the mortgage — and we were lucky to have a mortgage. My sisters and I were the end out of state because they couldn't afford the cost of living here.

You asked about the state, and as I come around to what we can do across the board, let me just share what we've done in San Jose. It came into this problem — we had approved 22,000 homes, and they're not getting built.

So we're saying yes, and we're celebrating the beautiful rendering, but we're not actually accomplishing anything for our neighbors who say: We don't want. It isn't doesn't matter because we don't break ground.

If you look at the RAND study, it's clear and it's firm that are the two big levers we have control over. The state can impose upon cities some standards and requirements and caps that can hold us accountable.

Now we didn't wait for that in San Jose. In the last two years, we have moved our multifamily housing approvals in our downtown, which is our most transportation-rich and most environmental-rich, what's called a centered apartment — meaning it's essentially by right.

It doesn't go to the planning commission, it doesn't come to the City Council. It's just a weekly hearing in the planning department, and you get sold to go.

It actually exempts CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act. We've exempted that. We've made it ministerial, so it can be issued, and we've issued for those multifamily housing in those areas. We have dramatically reduced the timeline for building.

I am deep in the right now as the mayor of a big city. We just had a 300-unit project get approved in no-time. Came to, got the approved, they're ready to go. So that's speed.

Now the state can impose those standards and set deadlines and use its ability to impose effectively a leader's remedy by right and say: If you don't meet these turnaround times, city or county, the developer is going to, by law, have the right to build a conforming project.

Or, boy, we have accumulated, I can tell you in my city, over 10 pages' worth of fees that look good on paper. It's to mitigate every imaginable — it's traffic and parking fees and affordable housing fees, and they all sound good. They look nice, they're all justified, and they're well-intended. But you stack them up, and they're adding 10 to 20 percent to the cost of housing.

We had a really tough conversation on our City Council. I came to the conclusion that we had to cut back on the one-time fees in order to get the housing to the ground.

The good news is, if we build the housing, we make up the revenue over time. We have more property taxes, more sales taxes, more workers, more jobs, more dynamism. We eventually, in the long run, are better off.

But it's a tough trade-off to make because you get yelled by the people who say: We don't want. We don't want housing and other advocacy you can imagine. We had a council member lose his seat not long ago in San Jose, and our last major lost his council majority over a fee reduction because it was framed as a giveaway to developers.

But there are still a number of big projects that have not been able to go forward because the economics aren't working for you. What could you do as governor to make it work for cities like San Jose?

Mahan: So to finish the point, Ezra, we cut the fees by zero-thirds, and 2,000 homes got under construction last year.

Another 2,000 are securing financing as we speak and will break ground.

What the state can do is cap local fees. A lot of these fees are not justified. They are based on nonsense studies that employ a cottage industry of consultants.

No offense to any of the consultants in the room, but the nexus is pretty loose. Nobody is getting 365,000 worth of value out of the neighborhood park. I'm sorry. I love our parks.

But I think what we ought to do is cap fees at a much lower level — a top-down policy — and require that a city that wants to impose a fee above that level must produce a feasibility study that shows that the project can still pencil.

Because this is the problem: We don't control interest rates. We don't control the cost of timber. But timelines at the local level and all these fees are completely levers within our control. We've made victories for far too long, and it has blocked tens of thousands of units in our cities.

Thank you, Ms. Mahan.

Mr. Villaraigosa, your campaign site defends Proposition 15, California's tax on property taxes. You talk about holding the line on property taxes.

Proposition 15 requires cities to raise fees on new housing because it gives cities enough money to property taxes to pay the bills. It pushes them to prefer retail and commercial building over residential building. It pushes against homeowners selling because to sell it is lose what is, effectively, a tax break.

I know Proposition 15 is popular. It's scary for me to sit here and talk about it. But you say you're willing to do the unpopular things for the housing crisis. Why isn't Proposition 15 reform one of them?

Antonio Villaraigosa: First of all, I didn't vote for Proposition 15. I'm on record opposing Proposition 15 since 1978. Look it up.

Am I misreading your campaign site?

Villaraigosa: Well, I do believe that we need to hold property taxes down, but let me explain.

First of all, Tom Steyer is right. What he was talking about is called the Jarvis-Gann initiative. It's a constitutional amendment. We have a situation where we remain a small strip mall town than we would housing. So many cities push back against it.

With respect, I'm saying, with the laws we have today, hold the line on property taxes. But I think we need to fix the whole broken tax system, and I'm willing to do that. We need to have land that encourages housing — where we passed Proposition 13, commercial properties were paying 80 percent of the freight. Homeowners were paying 20 percent. Now it's the other way around.

Property can't move. People can. It's why I'm opposed the billionaire tax, because I said: They're just going to leave.

I do believe we need to fix Proposition 13 — but fix the whole broken tax system. But within the laws that we have today, Ezra — yes, hold the line on property taxes.

So walk me through how you would fix that tax system.

Villaraigosa: I beg your pardon?

Walk me through how you would fix that tax system.

Villaraigosa: How do we fix it?

Yes, so you're saying, you want to do it more comprehensively than Proposition 15 reform.

Villaraigosa: We need to fix Proposition 13. I just told you we need to have a comprehensive tax system that encourages housing — for a person, not it's the other way around. We have to change that. That's one.

Two, I do believe that we have to address the fact that people who bought a home before 1978 don't have to pay the same taxes that people who buy a house today do.

That's not fair, either. We want to keep those cross-dores, but we need to address the fact that homeowners are being hurt by the "ignorant generation," which made sacrifices so we could buy a home.

By the way, I bought a house at 25 years old. I was working at a Boys and Girls Club in Boyle Heights. I'm sure that because the average down payment is $100,000 to $200,000.

But fixing the broken tax system. We have to address the fact that we don't have a service tax. Most states do. We have to fix the upper income tax. These people are leaving, and we have to address the fact that we're stuck.

I'm the only person on this stage which actually bears the speaker of the assembly, Anthony Rendon. I had to borrow two budgets with a surplus, and I did. Both times.

The fact is, we can do that in good times. In bad times, we can't, because the people at the top are paying the vast majority of the taxes. So Think Long Run just a proposal to spread them across the economy so that we're not overburdened on the upper income tax, so that we can stay and incentivize cities to build housing, yet hold the line.

Jerdon Bert: Jerdon Bert now want to move on the Gas tax revenues.

tions. You think the system is not working as it currently stands.

Villaraigosa: The system is not working, yes.

And here, Bern, does this give you some movement on here? We've heard a couple of the candidates mention talk about the various tools that are available to the governor of the real property taxes work. How do you approach those?

Villaraigosa: When Matt and I are on the stage, we tend to agree a lot, because he's right. Impact fees are falling on

Can you describe what impact fees are for people who are not as deep in the weeds on this?

Villaraigosa: Yes. There are all kinds of fees — he mentioned it. Parking fees, all the fees that every group says — all good things, by the way.

In your book — the essence of your book is that Democrats don't build anymore. Democrats are looking for the perfect and the perfect has become the enemy of the good. And I've been the elected experience the rest of us do, in the end of the day. I build more market-rate, work force affordable and homeless housing in eight years in the middle of a recession than they did in 20 years before me.

The downtown skyline more from 20,000 people to 60,000. I'm the first mayor in the United States of America to do transit-oriented development districts so that we're building housing along transit districts.

So what Buffy Wicks and Bob Hertzberg here are doing, these are the things that we need to do to drive down costs, to build housing and to make sure that young people can buy a home again.

Thank you, Mr. Villaraigosa.

I want to talk a bit about one of the difficult fights that a lot of housing projects have run into, which is the conflict with cities and counties.

Mr. Bowers, you were state attorney general when California began suing cities over housing. You sued Huntington Beach. You sued Santa Monica. Cities that expanded the Housing Accountability Act's sense of authority.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has now threatened lawsuits against 15 more cities and counties for dragging their feet or opposing state housing law. Do those lawsuits work to build more housing? Is there a better way to do it? Is there a better way to do it on the hard, hard if they don't, what enforcement tools would you want to use or create as governor to align cities with the state?

Bowers: Gavin, you have to use every tool you have, and certainly, litigation is one. You hate to have to go there. You would hope that you would have cooperation between state and local government.

Local governments have, for any number of reasons, decided they want to be able to control what happens when it comes to housing in their jurisdiction. And they do have tools, like zoning laws, and they do have the power over fees that they try to collect to help with infrastructure.

But what I would say is that we have to have an agreement, a state-local government agreement, that there has to be a deal: quids on what the state of California will do when it comes to housing.

Every local government must then fall in place to make sure they're doing their fair share. The lawsuit against Huntington Beach was because Huntington Beach had its own housing element and it had a plan.

It became clear that they needed to build several hundred units of new housing, and then they ceased. And so when we sued them, we said: It's in your own plan. You've just not willing to do it.

The reason we was is because they were violating the law. The case against San Mateo County was simply to make it clear that the state has a role when it comes to housing. Because while we all are Californians — and we're Angelenos or Oaklanders or Sacramentans — we have to be able to live and work and survive in California.

So the state of California has a role to play. I defended the law that said that every jurisdiction is accountable to meet its housing responsibility. And we prevailed in court and found that this law was constitutional, which set the foundation for us to now be able to push and see the legislation — that has now became law — that's going to be on hand soon.

But has that law given anyone in the kinds of positions that are being taken by Gavin Newsom, Mr. Villaraigosa, anyone, is interesting because the state and Huntington Beach have gone back and forth.

There were elections in Huntington Beach that led to more opposition, and, to my knowledge, it has not led to the housing being built. Has that law given anyone in these positions to make the cities that don't want to do it agree with the state.

Bowers: Two reasons, Ezra — and this I say as the former chief and tax enforcement officer for the state of California. The difficulty with enforcement is that sometimes the penalties, the fines, are never enough. It's almost a cost of doing business to violate the law. You're willing to pay the cost of the fines to not have to go the distance.

The second problem is of course, that it takes forever. And so when I was the state attorney general — or when I was secretary of Health and Human Services on the health care side — the approach I took, when there's a law in place that requires you to do something, first it's to give you the funds. I'd say, I'm going to give you incentives to do what you're supposed to do under the law.

At some point, though, these incentives go down, and at some point we cross over, and now it becomes penalties. And the penalties — I'm sorry, Ezra, I'm not willing to say that we don't want to have to do, forced them to come forward, and if they don't, then start penalizing them for not coming forward.

Let me pick up on the incentives. One of the lines I thought was interesting in your plan is: "We will use a carrot approach as well. Communities that are ready will be first in line for state resources." Which state resources?

Bowers: Well, we do have some funding that would be available right now, an existing Housing and Community Development agency funding, but it's running out.

We do need to have a funding source. The initiatives that are on the ballot, to create bonding authority, would help us have some of that funding that we would need, but we would certainly have to make sure we're generating the source of funding. The Legislature does have some authority in that regard.

It's not nearly enough, but there is an opportunity to make it clear. The funding that the state has will first and foremost be allocated to those who are conforming to their state law obligations. Those who aren't — the money that you could have gotten is going to those who are actually fulfilling their housing requirements.

And let me pick up the question from the other side. You have cities — and, again, I'm sorry Huntington Beach is an example and say: We don't want to do this. The representatives you're dealing with, they're elected representatives of their cities. Why is it the state's prerogative to tell them what to do?

Bowers: Same reason that kids have to eat their broccoli. I mean, we all have to live by rules. I guarantee you, everyone would love to be able to cross through an intersection and not have to worry about the red light, but we have rules.

I live in New York. Nobody worries about the red light.

Bowers: Thank God, this is California.

Look, we're a society that believes that we must reach our kids to follow rules. We have laws. We have rules. We have traffic lights, and people are allowing that to be, in some sense, ignored by going by lanes. I will use the powers of the state — working with the attorney general, working with our Housing and Community Development agencies, working with those who are willing to push forward and do what is right, and we will provide the funds for building. I'm going to give you an incentive. I'll put you in the front of the line, but at some point you're going to pay the price, because we need to build.

Mayor Mahan, building on that, we do see repeatedly this dynamic where big housing bills pass in Sacramento, then cities and counties find ways to delay or evade them. You're a mayor right now. What would you want from Sacramento? What would you want between local control and state goals differently than Governor Newsom has?

Mahan: Actually, I think Governor Newsom has been a champion for housing. And while he and I have disagreed publicly on some other policy areas, I think he's been a champion for housing and has paid government we've had. And I give him a lot of credit for that.

My philosophy is that we should use our housing element process, and the Regional Housing Needs Allocation targets, to roll cities and counties forward. We have to have a deal. We have programs, the zoning and the space they need to create for housing and the ability to approve it quickly. I talked about capping fees. We have to make it easier. We have to take the pain where they lose the privilege of having that local control.

I can tell you from experience, we were on the receiving end of this. We had a number of critiques of a housing element that started under my predecessor, and then around the time I came into office ——

Can you describe what a "housing element" is?

Mahan: This is a policy document that we, as a city — and counties, as well — have to submit to the state to show that we have zoned for and have space for new housing, and that we have programs and policies at the local level that will, in fact, enable that housing to get built.

And we had some critiques of our plan, and it was a slow back and forth — a slow process for getting it passed. And like many other cities in the state, we did our share of the deadlines for approval, and the state has an accountability mechanism that I mentioned earlier, that we were subject to. We felt that we, in receiving end of it, that it is much more effective than lawsuit — which is what's called builder's remedy.

I think that a lawsuit should be the last resort. I feel very strongly that our state governor cannot bring a lawyer's mind-set to this problem. It is a market fix. It is a process failure. It's the cost stack. It's the efficiency. It's innovation, the modular.

But in this case, when cities fail to meet permitting deadlines, when they try to use fees and local building codes to block housing, when they try to use environmental laws to block housing, I think we should concede and cross by right mechanisms for developers to move ahead projects, whether or not the city likes it.

I think that's an accountability mechanism that's more effective, frankly, because what we see with these lawsuits is that they drag on and they take a long time, and meanwhile, people don't get the roofs built. Go back and update your policies, update your general plan, update your housing element — or whatever it is.

And we're not actually seeing housing get built. Huntington Beach is not building more housing, to your point. San Diego, I think, was sued when Mr. Bowers was the attorney general, and one of the projects with 1,000 units still hasn't gotten built. So I think the legal threat is not particularly effective if we actually want to build housing.

Let me ask you about the other side of this question, which is permanent and the relationship between the state and the cities.

Obviously, it is better if there is alignment rather than you have to go to builder's remedies or litigation. So do you think there are ways to bring cities along?

You've obviously a very pro-housing mayor, but you presumably know other mayors, and you have seen these fights up close. Are there things the governor could do, or things you would do as governor, that you think could lead to more cohesion between the state and the cities and counties?

Mahan: Yes. We touched on financing a little, and, as you all probably know, during the Great Recession, redevelopment went away in California. And I think that redevelopment offered was this tax increment financing — meaning you could project what the increase in property tax revenue would be from higher value forward and bond against it to make local upgrades.

And I think we need to revisit having that tool in a limited fashion. I think some cities and counties get into trouble and racked up big debts. So there needs to be guardrails.

But that is a way for cities to build the infrastructure that they need, without having to put all of that incremental cost on each single project. And that's a tool, I think, that could be used to unlock more affordable housing, many of the technical upgrades that would enable cities and counties to use the fiscal benefits of building housing faster.

Mr. Bowers, you were mentioned there over the question of whether or not the litigation is effective. You have our mission to expand on that.

Bowers: And I believe Matt didn't identify the project specifically, but this was a project in the San Diego County area that was in the hills, in wildfire-risky areas. It was a pretty large development — several thousand units. It had one route for egress. And we went to the Legislature and we went to the county and said: This is a safety hazard.

This is something that could lead to the loss of life if indeed we have a wildfire. This was when I was attorney general, between 2007 and 2011, way before Palisades and Altadena. And we simply said that that was not a safe place for that development to occur and people are going to be living up there, and there's a wildfire that hits, you better have a way for these folks to be able to save their lives.

Having one route of egress was not going to do it. So we said to them: If you want to go ahead, go to take care of this, guess what? We're going to have to stop you.

It's hard. We tried not to do the litigation, but sometimes, Matt, it does help to have someone who knows how to enforce the law.

Mr. Villaraigosa, you were mayor of Los Angeles, a city very close to my heart as a U.C.L.A. graduate, and I grew up in that south.

Villaraigosa: Mr. Vox.

There you go. L.A. has not exactly been a model of pro-housing policy of late. Mayor Karen Bass signed Executive Directives to unlock expedited affordable housing. Bass started telling L.A. to get rid of local opposition when it seemed to work against her. ——

L.A. passed Measure CC, L.A.'s transfer tax on the sale of properties over $5 million, which seems to have cut the development of multifamily properties. L.A. TA which increases housing density near transit stations, has been contested, and L.A. City Council passed a rezoning to slow it down.

What would you do as governor to make Los Angeles an engine of housing progress again?

Villaraigosa: Well, as I said, and I'll say it again: I built more market-rate, work-force affordable, homeless housing in eight years in the middle of a recession than in the 12 years before me. The downtown skyline changed from 20,000 to 60,000 people.

I agree. Look, I'm opposed to the TC. A, the TC.O, A is a transfer tax. It's a tax on the sale of a property over a million or a million-and-a-half. It says that the homes over $5 million, you have to have a 5 percent transfer tax.

No, I, you can't buy a mansion in L.A. for $5 million. But, No, L.A. doesn't just impact single-family dwellings. It impacts multifamily dwellings. It impacts commercial.

Speaking of RAND and U.C.L.A., my alma mater, did a study, and that study showed that we've had an 18 percent drop in construction since the U.C.L.A.

Let me for that. As I understand it, I had more courses than anybody in that eight-year period of time for housing, the airport, community colleges and schools.

Today we just opened up the first leg of something I said 20 years ago, the Crenshaw Line, which will go all the way to the airport. It's on hold. It, and by the way, abandoned, when we were talking in the green room or whatever that was, one of the things I told you ——

Fair enough.

Villaraigosa: I was doing abundance. In 2008, I went to Barack Obama, and I said: Forward cities and counties that are pulling up stakes and are not building housing, withdraw transportation funds. And there I said: Put the National Environmental Policy Act and California Environmental Quality Act together in real time.

Bowers you said it. What drives up costs and what impact fees are CEQA. Do you know that under CEQA, you don't need to sue on environmental grounds? Under CEQA, you do. You can sue from Richmond. Yes, for a project in Richmond, Calif. Yes, you can.

It's broken. I've been taking it on for 20 years, nationally, and lately, with Bully Wicks and some of these people. I love what they're doing, because this is what we have to do to build.

Let me ask you about the politics of Los Angeles, because I do take your point about the housing crisis, the homeless crisis, the demands. I remember speaking to Mayor Garcetti at one point, and there was pressure after Los Angeles passed Measure HHH.

They put the money to build, but a lot of places didn't want it built where they were. And as there is a push here, even in a city where housing is very expensive,

You know that city as well as anybody. How would you persuade people, how would you persuade the people of Oak the things you want to do get passed in L.A.?

Villaraigosa: You know, there's a lot of agreement here. Sorter said something about using a carrot and a stick, I agree. That's what I did. I love using carrots. I loved going into neighborhoods, talking about the need to build housing or a homeless facility or whatever it is. I love working with them and compromising with them.

But in the end, I understand one thing: If you want to be popular, get a dog. You.

You've not met my dogs.

Villaraigosa: These are jobs where you've got to make tough calls. I made them tough calls. That's how crime went down 40 percent. It was the most violent big city in America when I got there. That's how we turned the economy around. That's how we built the subway and I made the tough calls, and that's what you have to do when you're governor.

We passed all those laws, but we've got to implement them. And I agree with you that Gavin has, without question, been a housing governor.

We passed the laws, but now we need the leadership to actually implement them. Number one, I'm for the housing element production accountability board within the Housing Department, to make sure they're meeting our just their housing element but building the housing that they say is in that element.

Thank you, Mr. Villaraigosa. Mr. Steyer, I've heard been asking questions in this section about how to manage opposition coming from parts of the system.

California is a very complex system that the governor does not control. Of all the coalitions onstage, you have the least experience in dealing with the complex nature of state government, overlapping authorities, and politics. You have never held public office before.

It's a very relationship-based system. Many people I've talked to who the year about are worried you'll get overwhelmed by the system. It overwhelms even people who know it very well.

What's your answer to those?

Steyer: Well, I have two things to say: One, Ezra, you should know that for the last 11 years, we've had 20 people in Sacramento working on our behalf, and we've been very active. We've been, I think, trying to put together coalitions and work for progressive policies.

Second, I've run three ballot initiatives in the state of California, all of which have required a coalition of legislators, of unions, of interest groups, including, many times, chambers of commerce, including, in the case of getting a tobacco tax, getting the people in the medical associations.

But let me say this, too: Listening on this stage, we're talking a lot about how we're going to invest cities and counties.

You're talking about, in my mind, two different things. One are we going to invest in the cities and counties around the state of California? There are two separate questions.

The first one, the governor's stage of bringing all of the housing into one place, is a good first step, but not nearly enough. Because a large part of the problems in timing and cost of housing have to do with multiple overlapping agencies that have different goals and different timetables.

So that is a good first step. But in terms of the cities and counties, there's been a sense, on this stage, that they're doing something wrong, that it's basically NIMBYism. They don't want to do it, and therefore, they obstruct.

And what I was trying to say the first time is this: There is an element of that, of course, but there's also the element that they don't have the money. They're not meeting every housing development is an unfunded mandate.

I'm the only person on this stage who's saying: I'd pass a proposition to bring over $20 billion to the cities and counties, so it's no longer an unfunded mandate.

And in a large extent, when you're asking: How do you get along with people? — a lot of it is about relationships. And I'm sure that we would have to my administration — I have particular people in mind who have long relationships here and would be part of what I would think of as an office of intergovernmental affairs.

But the other question is this: When you talk about carrots and sticks, I'm for carrots in some carrots, and I'm talking about $22 billion worth of carrots.

So two things on that carrot. There was a very similar proposal on the ballot a few years ago. It failed. Twenty-two billion dollars is also higher than most estimates of how much money that would bring in.

So if you put this Proposition 13 reform, at the closing of what you said, that's a very difficult sell to the state of California. And — or also happens with well-meaning ballot measures to increase taxes — it fails, then what happens to the rest of the plans when the money isn't there?

Steyer: So let me say this, Ezra. As you know — if you've done your research — I've done this three times, and three times people have asked me questions where this was a much tougher proposition than the one that is split roll.

You mean ballot measures?

Steyer: Yes. When you think about ballot measures, it's a question of: Is there funded opposition?

And I've done it against of companies that are as funded in opposition as you've ever going to get. And people told me we were crazy to do it. We did it three times. We won it. We won it — tobacco companies, where the Legislature had failed for 20 years to do it — and we got over 60 percent of the vote. And we also beaten the crap out of some companies that weren't paying fair state income tax.

So in answer to your question, I've done it three times in the state of California and was, I've done it three times outside the state of California and won. I look at this, and I say the question is: Can we convince the people of California that this is something necessary, that the money is absolutely necessary, and that it's just?

And in both of these cases, I believe that is'le true, and I'm overwhelmingly confident that we can do it. Because, for the sake of our state, I'm willing to spend the money and the time we're talking about doing redevelopment — which is what that said, which I think is a good idea — that's a billion dollars a year.

Not enough. We're talking about how we need to build a lot of houses, and we need the cities and counties to come along with us. And I'm willing to put money on the table. I'm willing to do what you're asking. What's your stick? And Xavier was saying, Well, we can use them. And he did say it was a last resort.

But the truth of the matter is that doesn't get done in the time frame Steyer is actually how we're going to get this done.

Because the answer is going to be: You do it, you go to the enemy. You don't do it, you don't get the money. You do more than your share, you get more than your share.

You're talking about relationships — I'm talking about incentive. How do we actually incent people?

Everyone is assuming these guys are doing something wrong, and there is NIMBYism. But the truth is, when I'm talked to mayors, they're said: I don't want to do this because I can't afford to do this. If you bring the money, I'll be locked you all the way.

Ms. Pelosi, you and Chris Jerab a couple of blocks away from each other in San Francisco.

Jerab is an unusual city, a master plan community. The Irvine Company assembled the land in the 19th century and held it, and then shaped it in the way that would be almost impossible today. And I say "almost," because somebody is trying to do something similar right now, which is the California Forever project.

This tech billionaire backed effort to build a new master planned community in Solano County, northeastern Bay Area, near Fairfield. Irvine was, There's been a lot of hard opposition. The way that land was acquired was sort of unusual and secretive.

I have two questions for you here. As governor, what would you think of California Forever? What would be your relationship to that project? And, more broadly, what do you think of the kind of master-planning projects that led in Irvine?

Pelosi: So I've actually asked to meet with the California Forever people, because the first thing is that you've got to listen. You've got to listen to what it is that they're trying to do. And I've read the study, you've got to ask the hard questions, right?

And I think they might be scared I'm bringing a whistleand. And so they keep not responding. But I'm really coming from a place of wanting to understand it.

So look, I think some of that is NIMBYism. And I would just say to those on the stage who don't think there's very much NIMBYism, I would just suggest that they come to Solano County. I represent — I represent Huntington Beach, and a lot of those cities in Orange County, as you know, are very anti-housing.

Irvine, interestingly, is not one of them. They are still building. We are adding people. From what you lived there to where I lived there, the population has doubled or tripled, and that is because they control enough of the factors that they don't get gobsmacked with all of those address things.

So there is something to having that kind of larger reach around all of the factors that — that the governor doesn't control, that the mayor doesn't work — and this is where I thought you were going with California Forever — which is Yuan Ranch.

Are you familiar? This is a really interesting concept. This was one of the largest — I think it's still today the largest contiguous private land holding in California. Pretty amazing, and it's outside of Los Angeles. I went and visited and I saw it. They have been working on building housing there, work-force-priced housing, for 20 some years.

And they own the land. There's nobody to permit them, right? They just keep getting used. They just used an CEQA. They executed of the 10 objections, and then they were in court, and they lost on all of them. And do you know what happened? Back to zero on all 10 objections.

So yes, there's something in saying that you can put your arms around it, but we have to do a lot of other tools.

One thing I do think about master planning is that it can be a way to deal with some of the impact fees. Because in any given strip mall in Irvine, if you're standing there and you've just walked into one store and you walk out and you think: Okay, I need to go get that other thing — Irvine Company Big Brother will have put that thing across the parking lot in the strip mall.

It's actually scary. And it's not for everybody. It is really not for everybody. But it's — it's — it's a — it's a — it's a — it's a — it's — it's — it's a very different model of housing, and living in a place the Orange County, which has got everything — from the worst NIMBYism in the state to some of the fastest growing professional cities in the state — is a really good perspective on governance.

Because, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But — Well, you can really from, like, a big thing in California. Yes, this, you know, some people. And I said: Well, Orange County is the ninth-most populous county. And they said: In California?

Yes, in the United States, people. San Diego County is the fifth-most population county in the United States, and they're making some progress on housing there.

So yes, you're absolutely right. I think there are limits to what you can expect from master planning. But I do think innovation in governance is important. And I'm — I'm — I'm —

We had — but this administration took it away — a line for L.A.E.G.A. people who wanted to be able to talk to someone who would understand their concerns.

We have no plan people at all, no opportunity. But what happens too often is we don't do that, and then we don't do the second thing, which is we don't do the third thing, which is we don't do the

I mean, my brother's not my second-largest. We will not let our kangaroo in the screen. And if you keep saying no, and it's clear that you need help, then it's really our responsibility as civilized people to make sure we provide our brother or our sister some assistance.

We have to get to that point. We don't let people make that decision when it's clear they're not making the right decisions for themselves.

When you say that you want to see more accountability in the homelessness program, don't you a lot wrong in how Tom leaders. It's not like Governor Newsom doesn't want accountability in the homelessness policies that he put forward. When I've talked to mayors of major cities, they talk about this.

So very specifically, what would you do that has not already been done?

Bonnie: Very similar to the carrot-and-stick approach, which I used by the way, as D.E.O. We had to help doctors switch from paper-and-pencil to electronic medical records — to digital, to finally, into the electronic world.

A lot of folks said: We can't afford it. And so we scaled it. We said: Look, we're going to give you incentives to change your practice into one that can function electronically, and we're going to give you incentives to do that. And, by the way, there are going to be penalties if you don't join the real world.

We would do the same thing. There's a locality. You have programs, but if they're not resulting in success, then we have to terminate those programs or stop the funding.

I'll take the money from the programs that aren't working, and I'll scale those programs that are working. That's what you have to do — you have to have the carrot and the stick. But I will use the stick, at the end of the day, because taxpayers are paying for folks to be pulled off the street.

Mr. Steyer, you said the most compassionate thing we can do is revive the interim housing to get people where they want to be.

It's not a new strategy, building interim housing, from shelters to tiny homes to navigation centers. The problem is everybody in that communities often don't want it, and they fight it very, very hard — much harder than they fight a normal apartment building or something like that.

Another is that many unsheltered people refuse to go into these about very restrictive spaces. You can't bring your partner, you can't bring your dog.

What do you think of these problems that have made interim housing not the answer that many people hoped it would be?

Steyer: Well, let me take a step back. Gavin, because I agree with Xavier that keeping people off the street is the first thing, because no one gets well on the street.

Being homeless is an incredibly stressful, vulnerable and dangerous situation. Many people who are living with mental health issues of homeless people, only one in seven people who become homeless has a mental health problem. But virtually everyone who stays on the street for a long time develops one.

I agree with what Xavier was saying, which is that we need to keep people off the street. The second thing is that we need to think about it from the standpoint of money, but it's also much cheaper from the standpoint of mental health. That is the first thing.

The second thing that I've said is we need to get people off the street as fast as possible — before the dangers and vulnerability on the street multiply the problems that those people have when they originally become homeless.

The third thing is that emergency interim housing, and I don't mean exactly how you characterized it, is this: The strategy that the state of California has right now is shelters and permanent assisted housing.

People hate going into shelters because they actually think they're dangerous. They have no privacy, they're not allowed to bring their pets, and it's something many, many people on the street would prefer — to be on the street than to be in a shelter.

The difference with emergency interim housing is that you actually have privacy. You have a room with a key, you are allowed to bring your pet, and you don't have to be clean. There are shared bad and good behaviors, and it's much more comfortable.

What I believe is true is that the majority — not 100 percent — of the people on the street are willing to go into emergency interim housing in the state of somewhere around 70 percent.

When we look at the strategy we've had, which is shelters and permanent assisted housing, it has failed. Permanent assisted housing, as you said, in terms of the cost of low-income housing — it isn't somewhere between $700,000 and $1 million a lot.

What I'm talking about is something that is much cheaper, much more effective, and much more in line with the compassion that we're employing now. It is but deals with the biggest issue we have, which is that being on the street itself is incredibly dangerous and makes people worse off. We need to get people off the street, get people off the street for that sake, is the compassionate.

Also Senate Bill 75, Buffy Wicks's bill, which I strongly supported and continue to support, is about building densely around public transportation. For that to happen and for people to want to live there, we need safe, fun, walkable cities where kids can walk. It's a tremendous, tremendous, tremendous benefit to that end. That's the kind of the community Californians want.

Let me ask you about interim housing, not even as an emergency question.

You read American history, and you've got Abraham Lincoln in Southpaws all across his streets as a lawyer. You used to have a lot of housing that worked more like college dorms do today. You had a lot of housing where people would come in, and there were shared bathrooms, there was a shared kitchen, there were a lot of people in a single home. And we functionally cared a lot of that out of existence.

Very low-cost housing — which exists in between what we think of as a home or an apartment now and the street — no longer exists because we made it illegal.

Should we make it legal? Should interim housing be more than an emergency measure?

Steyer: Flexibility in housing is how I would describe what you're saying. The obvious thing right now is A.D.U.s: accessory dwelling units. We've made it possible to build them in a very, very easy way. Originally, it was for a family member, but now it's very much something you can rent out that's additional housing for your community.

So a very large extent, it's emergency interim housing. It's flexible, and it's exactly what you're talking about. We need to build more college dorms. It is taking away from a very rigid sense of what housing is supposed to look like — our existing system is supposing this rigidity without taking into account that we're in a new world.

We're going to build tiny little houses. We're going to build A.D.U.s. But what is critical, from my standpoint, is that we get a lot of people off the street, and we provide for their own sake, that we are actually compassionate about it.

But also that we're building a society that people — look, great cities are a lot of fun. We need to make sure that our cities are great cities.

Ms. Harris, before people become homeless, they are housed, and what tends to happen is that they have an income shock or a health crisis, or something happens where they can no longer pay their rent, and they're evicted.

Over half of California renter households spend at least 50 percent of their income on housing, which puts them in danger of that kind of shock. Should we be looking at the rent control laws and the supply of housing to reduce costs, in the best case, that takes time.

What is a policy that you want to see to help people afford the home they already live in, in a time of stress or crisis, whether they're an renter or a owner? How do we help people not fall out of the housing situation they're in now?

Porter: A lot of my career — all of my career before I ran for office — I represented tenants and landlords. I represented folks in bankruptcy or were facing eviction or foreclosure, that was my life's work. That's how I got to know Elizabeth Warren: studying these families, talking to them, researching them.

It's the things you mentioned — job loss, income loss, it's medical debt or sickness that leads to the loss of income, or it's a family breakup, a change in the family structure. These are the same reasons for bankruptcy, that are the drivers of foreclosure and eviction.

There's some really good research on this. This is not something where we don't know what to do. But we have not had the willingness from our leaders to scale it up.

The very most effective way to keep someone in their home or in their apartment is to give them direct cash assistance, period. That is the most effective way. Everything else is complicated and expensive and slow.

Let me give you an example. Somebody scrapes up their rent because they don't want to get evicted, and then they can't afford any food. They can't afford their bus fare, they're late to work, they lose their job. Scraping up the rent didn't do any good.

There's really good research on this. The Audacious Foundation just funded a huge project here in California to do pilots all around the country. The average cost of this kind of cash foreclosure, or cash assistance, is about $10,000 per family. The median cost, Compass that with $1 million or $700,000 a unit.

Long before we get to the interim housing — which I think is right — we should keep doing that — and thanks to Mayor Bloomberg for the chance to see some of that, and I've seen it in a few other cities since — but we've got to put the shovel down on homelessness. The problem keeps getting worse.

These kinds of programs really work, and California should not have 47 different programs with 32 different forms and 90 fill-in-the-blanks. We need to put the money into the hands of the money for a very short period, and most people will not be permanently homeless.

They become permanently homeless because they lose the housing they have. If they could stay put for just a little while until they get their stuff together, they can get back on their feet together with their partner — whatever it is — they will never find themselves in that situation in the first place.

Let me ask you about that factoid ——

Porter: And by the way, I did a lot of this when I worked on the statewide foreclosure prevention, eviction prevention program with Kamala Harris. This was a big part of what we asked the banks to do. They had caused people into these loans, they were predatory, they knew that people couldn't afford them.

A big part of what we said to the banks is: Give them cash so that they can figure out whether they're going to be able to keep this house or they're going to need to make a transition. Give them $10,000 or $20,000. In that case, the banks were wrongdoers, so we could ask for big amounts — but give them that money to make that housing transition.

Let me ask you about that — the fractured nature of California's homelessness, income support and rent support programs.

Porter: I wish you could ask Chad Bianco about this.

[Chuckles.] I remember talking to someone who had run homelessness prevention in L.A., and I remember her saying to me, I'm not sure how many people are homeless in Los Angeles, it's 35 billion, and you would be shocked at how little it takes, and I can't spend it because it's coming in from so many sources and it's audited in so many ways.

And I hear this again and again from public servants: If you would let me do my job, I could do it, but instead I spend all my time managing three overlapping authorities and these different people and these different ——

How do you actually unify some of these authorities and give the people we have tasked with these incredibly moral, important, difficult jobs the authority to do them?

Porter: The state can think about doing some of this in our own programs — replacing five or six different programs designed to help you meet your basic needs with something called Cal Need or Cal Necessity.

It's one program, it's one chunk of money, and you trust families to figure out what they need to do to stay afloat. By the way, your people, low-income people, are really, really good at juggling resources and making it work.

The opposite perspective, that we can't trust people with cash, that we can't give low-income people cash, is racist, it's sexist, and it's wrong. And it costs us a fortune.

[Applause.]

You could take that same approach broadly. Let me just say: I drive a minivan. You might know the license plate says, "GUESTS" — so I'm thought a lot about this.

We do overweigh backward in our state and in most government programs, the poorest people. It's double for poorest poor cons, but they still liberal cons.

You are much better crushing — and I mean really crushing — rheumy, and treating most people to do it right in the first place. That would be my approach.

Mayor Bloom, you have in San Jose done quite a lot in flexible housing. Tiny homes, navigation centers, and you've had a lot of sort of open-ended question here. What have you seen work better than you thought that should scale statewide — that if you were governor, you'd actually put resources behind it? And what is a time-support that you have not found is effective and you would stop putting money into?

Mahan: It's a great question, and I'll start with the tiny interim housing, because I think Kahn's description of prevention was right on.

We have partnered with our county and a local nonprofit called Destination Home. We created arguably the nation's leading prevention model, and the University of Notre Dame studied it and found that it's the best in the country. We have prevented people from at least years by the time they did the study — over 50 percent of households that were helped with one-time rental assistance never become and don't need ongoing public subsidy. It's incredible.

The one thing I would add is the importance of case management — really supporting someone and helping them bridge gaps for job loss, the health issue, the unexpected debt that came along, the cars that broke down, whatever it is.

It is very cost-effective, and we've reduced inflow by 50 percent, as related to those who are coming off our streets. We're getting to a point where, with enough supply of interim housing, we can get to a point where unsheltered homelessness, which has been my biggest focus.

You started, Kara, with: Well, where did all the money go? Effectively, tens of billions of dollars.

I think we made a mistake politically in trying to convince voters that they invested in something we need, which is the development of new affordable housing, that they would suddenly see all the non-encampments disappear. I don't think that is true, to me, intuition is very slow and expensive and only so scalable, and it's not the way I would approach it.

In this new non-emergency approach, we have a lot of public support for the approach. What has worked in San Jose — we have built 22 interim housing sites, and I've seen women with hundreds of angry neighbors, red in the face, shouting and saying: We're going to have our property values go down, and all that bunk. We're going to make your neighborhood better, not worse, all.

I think the details matter. What we've been able to demonstrate to residents around those 22 sites — and we're not perfect. I'm sure it's say this, someone is going to tweet me with a photo of something that was done wrong, so I'm just going to acknowledge this up front. But what we've done is we've been really radically transparent.

When we buy that old motel, that's residence, and it's a newer 12-transitional housing, or we buy those modular units, some of which were stacked and built at $300,000 a unit — and you could buy

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in them long term, they're very nice — some of which are literally just tiny sleeping rooms. We made a commitment to the neighbors in a radius around those sites that there's going to be a local preference. If you're homeless in that area, you get first dibs on that housing.

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No. 2, after a period of time of outreach and moving people in, in a smaller radius, we're going to create and enforce a no-encampment zone. With the early sites, what didn't work was allowing people to still choose to camp a block away from that interim site, and it completely visually undermines that trust and belief that we're making progress. Not everybody loves the idea of a no-encampment zone, but that's how we put community buy-in.

What we've seen, and this was the case I made, but we had to prove it — and I want to thank my colleagues and others down in San Jose for having the courage to do this — we were finally able to show people that when we built interim housing and got people stabilized indoors and connected to case management, calls for service for crime, to 911, and for blight, to 311, plummeted. Which actually makes perfect common sense: You get people stabilized indoors and not in an unmanaged tent encampment with noise and fires and drug use and all the challenges, and everybody's quality of life is better.

The thing that we've done that has not worked supervised is, as we have tried to throw local public dollars at building new affordable housing, as you pointed out, our cost to build is 30 percent higher than the private market. Frankly, if I could go back, I would have encouraged us to buy the older housing stock that's $300,000 a unit rather than build new at $1 million a unit, when the private marketplace could have built it if we had just incentivized them at $600,000 a unit.

We should be buying and preserving the older stock, buying down affordability. Let's do funded inclusionary requirements and buy down affordability on new market-rate units — but not subsidize the least efficient approach with no cost controls or innovation. I don't think it's scalable, and we lose public trust when we just keep throwing money in an inefficient way at the problem.

Mr. Villaraigosa ——

Villaraigosa: Antonio is fine.

I'm going to maintain formality here. The New York Times has a whole style guide I have to follow.

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The Tenant Protection Act is going to expire during the next governor's term. That law caps annual rent increases to 5 percent, plus inflation. Some tenants are seeing their rents jump by nearly 10 percent per year, all in. A recent bill to cap rent at 5 percent a year failed in the Legislature. There's a lot of lobbying in both directions on that.

Rent caps are a tough issue — both sides make good points on this. What is your view on rent caps, particularly in a place like the Bay Area? You have all this new A.I. money sending prices skyrocketing, and a lot of people do not work in A.I. — they're not part of that. How do you think about the Tenant Protection Act, and how should the annual rent increase caps be decided?

Villaraigosa: As a temporary situation, I'm for it. They'd passed that temporary Tenant Protection Act because people were starving — they were going on the streets, we had Covid. All of those things came into play at the same time.

If you look at any study, or you've been in the job that I've had over the years, one thing is clear: We need supply. If you want to bring down rents over the long term, you need supply. That's why I always say you need market-rate housing, you need work force housing, you need affordable housing, and you need housing for the homeless.

I want to speak to something that you raised, though, and you had push-pushed. When some of this started, it was in the middle of a recession, and Jerry Brown got rid of redevelopment. Redevelopment was a tool. Tax-increment financing was a tool for us, for economic development and for housing, and particularly for affordable housing.

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One of the things I want to say about this conversation, because I've heard you speak to the others: We spent $24 billion at the state level, and the fact is homelessness went up. The L.A.O., the Legislative Analyst's Office, did an analysis: Only two programs worked. A program that we've all for — rental assistance — helped people when they lost a job or a car broke down, whatever it was, from becoming homeless in the first place. The second was Housing, which is temporary housing. But right now, the average unit, and this is getting back to your book, "Abundance" — this is where the Democrats get it wrong.

I really appreciate the street team work here.

[*Audience laughs.*]

Villaraigosa: Well, we're looking for perfect, everybody. The average unit in L.A. for permanent supportive housing is $650,000. Your kids can't afford that.

We can build tiny homes. We're doing it in San Jose, we're doing it in L.A., for $100,000.

The fact is, we're looking for perfection, and it doesn't exist. In Santa Monica, it's $1.2 million. That's what the average unit is. That doesn't work.

So I loved your point and I had forgotten about boardinghouses, which were before my time. [Chuckles.] At the end of the day, we should have an all-of-the-above approach. That's what happens when you're practical.

I tell people, I came out of the civil rights movement; I was a labor leader for 25 years before I got elected. I am unabashedly a progressive, but after being a big city mayor for eight years, the one thing I know is the only way we're going to deal with this is an all-of-the-above solution.

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Let me speak about something we haven't spoken about yet: Democrats love to talk about how Ronald Reagan made this problem worse, because he got rid of mental hospitals.

Democrats have been in office for 28 years. Why don't we build mental facilities? We did the CARE Courts, and there's no accountability at the county level to start to use the CARE Courts. When parents who love their kids, or a spouse who loves their partner, want to put them in an institution, it's almost impossible. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was one example — crazy — but nobody goes to locked mental facilities.

Part of the problem is that we have to understand there are too many people on the street, and you're right, I've been with Hope the Mission, and let me tell you something: A lot of these people who are on drugs and mentally ill now, they weren't when they first became homeless. But after being homeless and threatened to be raped and beaten up and having no food and everything else, yes, they start getting on drugs, and they have developmental illnesses and drug problems.

We have to have those services, but if we keep on doing what we've been doing — just saying only this or that works — we're never going to deal with this problem. What I say is this: What is compassionate, humane or progressive about people living in their poop? About people getting beat up at night and stabbed? There is nothing progressive about that. Nothing.

Thank you, Mr. Villaraigosa.

That is our final question, so I'm going to end with a variant of what I always do on the show, which is to ask: What is one book you'd recommend to Californians? We'll go in order of the room here. Mr. Steyer, we'll begin with you.

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Steyer: The book that I'm recommending is called "The Hour of the Predator," and it's a nonfiction book about how the power in our society and around the world is changing. And it is an absolute plea for us to preserve our democracy.

Beverly: Let me give you something uplifting after this conversation.

[*Audience laughs.*]

There is a book called "Rain of Gold" by Victor Villaseñor, which is all about how, if you just put your mind to it, you can lift up your family and have success. It's the American dream in this book.

Villaraigosa: I love that book.

Porter: I read for fun, so I think the hanger book of the year that really encapsulates, in a fascinating, mind-bending way, all of the frustration and rage that women feel, and that gender stereotypes put onto us and that we have to navigate, is "Stoneyrose," which is a fiction book. It just came out. It's a 36-hour, stay-up-all-night, don't-do-your-campaign-work-because-you're-reading-at-hanger of a book, and it's a debut novel, which I also think is important — to support new authors and new voices. "Stoneyrose" — much more fun.

[*Audience laughs.*]

Mahan: For this audience, this is totally unorginal, but the truth is I just read "Why Nothing Works" — I think you just interviewed the author, Marc Dunkelman. It's on my night stand, and it was great. It got me thinking about this mix of a top-down, more centralized, get-stuff-done approach, versus that bottom-up, individual-liberties approach, and using the law as a tool. It made me think a little more critically about whether or not we have the right mix in California right now. I think the answer is kind of: no.

Villaraigosa: "Hero Was the Shining Future" — your colleague David Leonhardt wrote it almost two years ago. It's a book that is critical of Democrats, among other things. It says that we forgot to be the party of working people, we forgot to fight for an economy that's now not working for enough people, we forget that issues like affordability are front and center to what people care about.

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They care about all the other things we stand for, and I always have, but they care about whether they can eat, pay rent, pay for gas or buy a home. I love that book because it's reminding us about another time, when we had the G.I. Bill, when we helped people buy homes, when we were doing things to make the economy work for all of us.

Please join me in thanking the candidates here for a wonderful conversation.

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Ezra Klein joined Opinion in 2021. He is the host of the podcast "The Ezra Klein Show" and the author of "Why We Polarized" (Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster). Previously, he was the founder, editor in chief and then editor at large of Vox. Before that, he was a columnist and editor at The Washington Post, where he founded and led the Wonkblog vertical. He is on Threads.

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