

Collishaw: Prop. 1 gives people chance for homeownership

October 10, 2018

By: Tom Collishaw



Madelyn Sepulveda is building her own home in Wasco along with nine other families, part of a self-help housing program which has helped over 710 families achieve the dream of home ownership in Kern County. Madelyn's 4-year-old son Homero inspired her to seek a new home in a good neighborhood. Even though she works full time as an office manager in an auto repair shop, Madelyn and Homero have been staying with various relatives because she couldn't afford a place of her own. Despite the grueling labor requirements of the program, she is making it work with family and friends. "It hasn't been easy, but I know at the end it will be worth it," Madelyn Sepulveda said.

Affordable housing projects for people like the Sepulveda family are only built when resources to build them are available. We have an opportunity to create thousands of housing opportunities when we vote on Nov. 6. Proposition 1 is the only measure on the ballot that builds and provides affordable homes for veterans, working families, seniors, people with disabilities, the homeless and others in need of a stable home.

The facts: One in three Californians can't afford their rent, and housing costs continue to climb because we simply don't have enough affordable homes. Many people are spending more than 30 percent of their incomes on housing and some as much as 50 percent of their incomes on housing. This leaves little left to pay for other basic needs such as groceries and child care.

According to the 2018 "Out of Reach" report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a renter earning minimum wage would have to work 63 hours per week to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment in Bakersfield. For a three-bedroom apartment, the workweek would rise to 91 hours per week, requiring two full time jobs!

Zillow reports the median price of homes in Kern County is currently \$250,000, and the median rent is \$1,350 per month. At these prices, it is necessary for households to earn at least \$60,000 per year to afford decent housing. This means many hardworking people, such as grocery clerks, office managers, nurse aides and teaching assistants, need to earn 80 percent more than their current annual income to live in a decent unit. Many are simply giving up on their dream of home ownership.

When working families are priced out of their communities, children like Homero suffer. Nearly one in five children in California lives in poverty and much of that is due to housing costs.

Meanwhile, the affordable housing crisis has exacerbated the homeless crisis on our sidewalks and streets. California has 24 percent of the national veteran population that is homeless – the largest share of any state.

All this points to exactly why Prop. 1 is needed now more than ever. A portion of the \$4 billion bond specifically helps veterans access housing with the CalVets Home Loan program that has already helped 423,000 veterans and their families.

We all benefit when we help people like Madelyn and Homero Sepulveda access affordable housing. Together, we can stem the flow of children and families who are at risk of becoming homeless or are forced to live in unsafe conditions. We can ensure that farmworkers and other working families can live in a home where they can thrive. We can help make sure seniors who have worked their entire lives can live their final years with dignity in a safe, affordable home. And we can make sure we honor veterans with stable housing when they return from service.

"Mom, I'm gonna have my own room," Homero Sepulveda, who has never had one before, said.

If you appreciate the importance of creating opportunities for California children like Homero to have a good room to live in, the choice is pretty simple on Nov. 6: Vote yes on Prop. 1.