

TALKING POINTS

White House Council of Economic Advisers' *State of Homelessness in America*

OVERALL:

Homelessness, and particularly unsheltered homelessness, IS a crisis and something needs to be done about it quickly.

The Administration could help by asking for more funding for housing; expediting access to surplus federal properties; and ramping up treatment for physical and behavioral illnesses.

This is not the direction indicated in a report just released by the White House Council of Economic Advisers. It focuses on aggressive policing, making it less “tolerable” for people to sleep on the street, and deregulating housing.

The first two have been tried, don’t work, and may not be legal. The third could reduce housing costs but would take decades to impact homelessness.

We might not know everything about homelessness, but we know that people who have a home aren’t homeless. If the Administration wants to solve the homeless problem, it could help get people homes.

RESPONSES TO THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS THE REPORT DESCRIBES:

Report: homelessness is high because of housing regulation – would go down with de-regulation

- De-regulation of housing development is probably a good idea in a lot of communities, depending on what “de-regulation” means.
- If housing were totally deregulated today, and housing costs fell as the report predicts, it would still take DECADES before the impacts tricked down to homeless people.
- Housing subsidies might still be required.
- De-regulation is a local responsibility – not clear how the federal government could compel it (except possibly through incentives or states of emergency)
- There is no guarantee that housing built after de-regulation would be affordable

Report: people sleep on the street because it is “tolerable;” fewer people would sleep on the street if there were more active policing making it less “tolerable”

- Places with active policing (ex: San Diego) still have a lot of street homelessness.
- Police have no tools to address homelessness – only ticketing and arrest.
 - Ticketing results in unpaid fines and/or bench warrants, and incarceration – both make it harder for people to rent housing or get a job.
 - Arrests result in criminal records and make it harder for people to rent housing or get a job.

- Police do have a role, in partnership with local government and service providers.
- Police should protect the safety of people who are homeless.
- Sleeping on the street is already at the lowest level of “tolerability.”

Report: having a lot of shelter (really the right-to-shelter) causes more homelessness; no particular approach to this indicated

- The report is really talking about a legal right to shelter, not the supply of shelter more generally
 - The right to shelter does sometimes extend the length of time people are homeless, resulting in higher counts.
 - Also by having more people in shelter, where the counts are more accurate than among unsheltered, a higher number of people would be counted.
- Everyone should have shelter, and everyone should have housing. Having a right to one (shelter) and not the other (housing) does cause problems.
- There should be enough shelter for everyone – not necessarily a legal right to shelter.
- A right to housing would be a better solution

Report: Individual level demand factors (mental illness, addiction, incarceration, low incomes, weak social connections) cause homelessness; no particular approach to this indicated

- True -- people’s characteristics (race and having young children are others not mentioned) may make them disproportionately poor and therefore disproportionately affected by the lack of affordable housing, and therefore at disproportionate risk of homelessness.
- The federal government could do something about these things:
 - Make treatment (including through health insurance) available to people with mental illness, addiction, physical disabilities
 - Fund housing for people re-entering, and remove barriers to housing
 - Increase the minimum wage
 - Provide critical time intervention and others evidence-based practices to enhance social connections
 - Reduce the disproportional representations of most minorities – especially African Americans – in the homeless population and ensure that there are not racial disparities in the homeless system
 - Provide day care, early childhood education, and support for young, low income parents and their children
- Generally, the Administration has proposed cuts to these things

Report: the homeless programs don’t work, and the decreases since 2007 are the result of a shell game with the numbers; no particular approach to this indicated¹

- The homeless programs do work, and have reduced homeless since 2007
 - Not in every community or every year.
 - Overall the number is down around 15%
- Homelessness is now going up because more people are BECOMING homeless – not because the homeless programs do not work

¹ *The report says that transitional housing was reduced, and all the money transferred to rapid re-housing; that those are really the same, but HUD just called the people in TH homeless, and the people in RRH not homeless; and that this resulted in the decreases.*

- The homeless programs are housing people faster than ever
- The homeless programs are increasingly coordinated, focused on outcomes and evidence-based.
- They have been increasingly effective, and the Administration should applaud and reward that
- The assumptions used to arrive at this criticism are incorrect
 - The report does not understand the difference between homeless and housed people
 - It assumes someone living in a homeless facility (transitional housing) and a private home (rapid re-housing) are both homeless
- Even using that faulty reasoning does not fully explain the drop.

OTHER ISSUES RAISED IN THE REPORT:

“Trump Administration Actions to Reduce Homelessness”

Talking point: This list of what the Administration has already done gives little hope for the kind of serious, comprehensive initiative that would be needed to make a dent in homelessness.

Issue	What they say they did about it	Comment
De-regulation of housing	<u>Established a council</u> (WH Council on Eliminating Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing).	Administrative No short- or mid-term impact on homelessness #s
Policing/law enforcement	Slight (1%) <u>reduction in violent crime</u> through “a series of executive orders that supported by the police”	Not relevant to homelessness #s
Addiction treatment	President’s policies <u>reduced drug overdose deaths</u>	Not relevant to homelessness #s
Improve access to mental health services	Appointed first-ever <u>Assistant Secretary</u> for Substance Abuse and Mental Health at HHS	Administrative No short-term impact on homelessness #s
Improve chances for people exiting prison	First Step Act	Small impact on homeless #s
Increase incomes at the bottom	Strong economy	Without minimum wage increase, not much impact
Regulatory changes	1-Housing First (via NOFA allow organizations to <u>require service participation</u> after people enter) 2-Emphasize <u>employment</u> in the NOFA	1-People who are exited from HF may become homeless again 2--Good