

Scapegoat City

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and homeless advocates in a losing fight last year to defend the rights of the homeless to sit on the 3rd St. Promenade, now takes a different view.

"While the protesters are right about the gap between shelter space and the number of homeless in need is quite true, Santa Monica spends more per capita on the homeless than just about any other city in California," he said — echoing the same excuses for repression used by officials in Santa Cruz, Berkeley, Palo Alto, San Francisco, San Jose, and Eureka.

Councilmember Ken Genser claims the City of Santa Monica spends \$2 million per year on homeless services. "And 93% of the money goes to salaries," responded Ron Taylor. "Homelessness is big business — if you're not homeless."

Waggoner is an old hand at bringing bad conditions to public notice. Last year, she wrapped up in a towel and bathed in a City Council sink in the presence of members of the press to pressure the city to reopen public showers [*Street Spirit*, September, '97]. Four months later, Waggoner occupied the boarded-up Flamingo Motel and established shelter space for more than 100 until police sawed her out of the lock-down claw and took her to jail. [*Street Spirit*, April, '98]. On Christmas, Jennafer and others slept out at a Nativity scene set up by the City to show that mannequins get better shelter than homeless people.

She is not exactly welcomed with open arms these days at City Hall. Her criticism of councilmembers at their meetings has prompted them to walk out and even call for her arrest. "This city is not the evil empire," complained Feinstein. "Jennafer slams us, thus alienating the grassroots support from those who are housed."

"We've had to endure a lot of criticism for speaking out at City Council," Waggoner responded. After one hotly contested session, Mayor Robert

"Whatever deal you make with the City, expect it to be broken... And if Jennafer and the homeless protest cost them a seat on City Council, then good. They deserve to lose the seat." — Ron Taylor, homeless activist

Holbrook complained, "The people in this city think they control our agenda."

"I think that's outrageous," said Waggoner. "If the people don't control the agenda, who does?"

In responding to the question of whether Santa Monica was to blame for inadequate shelter this winter, Ron Taylor observed, "We've got to blame it right on the top. It was Governor Pete Wilson who wouldn't open the armories."

As Feinstein candidly admits: "Clearly the homeless got screwed because the weather changes were not matched by social service response. A lot of the homeless don't like it, but we are surrounded by cities who don't do anything. They publicly say they don't need to provide

homeless services because Santa Monica does. Malibu, Beverly Hills, Culver City don't do anything at all. Rather than rallying to support us, they act like we haven't done anything. Nobody protests at Culver City. Nobody protests in Beverly Hills. To be singled out is ludicrous."

Taylor counters this argument with some heat: "Why do we have a 96-year-old woman sleeping on the front lawn of City Hall? What the hell! She was a resident 65 years of Santa Monica. Starting in

1993 she slept for over two years on the front lawn at City Hall and in city parks. A woman named Annie Paschell."

Santa Monica's official hostility to the poor is well documented. The City Council fired City Attorney Bob Meyers for being too pro-homeless after he refused on principle to write a ban on sleeping and feeding the poor in 1992.

Feinstein sees a dilemma: "The more we do, the more people will come here. We could provide more shelter space, but it wouldn't solve the problem."

For him, sheltering homeless people only "creates" more homelessness, or, at least, more visible homeless people to annoy swing voters. Some merchants and developers are afraid that homeless people

drive away tourists. The logic is clear. Since tourist dollars fund homeless services, we must ban the homeless in order to save them.

Activists say the Santa Monica camping ban is cruel and unusual punishment since there is literally nowhere for homeless people to sleep. Feinstein, however, says things aren't so bad: "There are no public camping areas so that no other space exists to sleep. Unofficially, the doorway option and people sleeping on the beach is what people do. The police know this, and only rarely is ticketing actually occurring." Councilmember Genser claims police issued only 86 citations in 1997. "That's only one every 4 days."

But Waggoner has a different perspective because she has been homeless, and spends many hours with homeless people, putting together her street newspaper, running a feeding program, dealing with the AIDS crisis, and organizing protests.

"It's more like police are chasing people all around town, and ticketing them when they can — if they see the same homeless person around for more than a few weeks, that's when they start citing them," said Waggoner, who lost her own van in a protest in 1996.

Taylor concurred: "It's the Walkers' Syndrome. They want us to keep walking."

Those wishing to support the protest may call Santa Monica Flamingians ReUnite! at (310) 289-7446 or send e-mail to refugee@gte.net

Robert Norse contributed to this story