

In April 2004, Patton pushed many closer to homelessness by moving to end rent control at Clear View Court, the only remaining rent-controlled trailer park in Santa Cruz. At the same time, he backed spending \$15 million in public funds to subsidize a multimillion-dollar hotel across the street from the trailer park.

Most recently, the shallowness of Kennedy's convictions about social justice issues in his own backyard was exposed when Human Rights Organization co-founder Bob Patton spoke at the City Council meeting on April 13. Patton presented the Bringing America Home Act to the council and community in the brief period the Brown Act allows for public comment.

BRINGING AMERICA HOME ACT

The Bringing America Home Act (H.R. 2897) currently being discussed in Washington, D.C., is meant to address homelessness at the national level. It was introduced in the 108th Congress by Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN) and John Conyers (D-MI) in July 2003. The bill is designed to end homelessness in the United States and includes housing, health, income and civil rights components. It is backed by the National Coalition on Homelessness in Washington, D.C., as well as the U.S. Conference of Mayors, NAACP, National Organization for Women, the United Farm Workers, and the SEIU union.

Seconds after Patton made his presentation to the City Council, Kennedy called him back to the speaker's microphone. The mayor told the startled activist, the packed chamber, and the hundreds watching on cable television, that the Bringing America Home Act would be an agenda item at the next regular meeting on April 27, 2004. In response, Patton's Human Rights Organization and HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) scheduled a press conference and invited speakers to further the public discussion.

Patton then secured Bob Erlenbusch, executive director of the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness and chairperson for The Bringing Home America Campaign, to speak to the council on April 27 and lead the press conference preceding it. Other activists arranged for food to be provided and put out press releases. Invited to the event were local service providers and homeless people recently thrown onto the streets by the closing of the winter Armory shelter.

In Santa Cruz, during eight months of the year, there is sleeping space for fewer than 40 people out of an estimated homeless population of 1500-2000.

"I felt pretty positive that the mayor would stand by his word," Patton said, "since he had said it in such a public way and with such a definite tone of voice." Some activists weren't so sure and urged

Patton to have a special meeting with the mayor to hammer out the details.

MAYOR'S PROMISE UNRAVELS

On Thursday, April 22, Bob Patton met with Mayor Scott Kennedy in his office to nail down details of the upcoming council session. In an e-mail describing the outcome of that meeting, Patton noted, "The main reason for this meeting with Scott was to ask for an additional two minutes of time for an outside speaker to address the issue when it came up." Public comment time is only three minutes, and guest speaker Erlenbusch was traveling over 500 miles to speak on a complex topic.

The first thing Patton learned was that, in spite of Kennedy's earlier public commitment, the Bringing America Home Act would not be on the City Council agenda. Patton pressed Kennedy for an explanation. The mayor explained that he could possibly add it to the agenda since the mayor sets the agenda, but he would have to add equal time for dissenters or make public note of dissension within the council

members. Patton readily agreed, but then described what happened next.

"When he sensed I was ready to accept that, he then backpedaled again," Patton said. "He claimed that other council members he shared information with and took counsel from had strong reservations as to addressing this issue. As our meeting progressed, he further hardened his stance to say that he would not go against the will of those on the council who oppose having the bill addressed."

What was wrong with a bill that would bring additional federal resources to local authorities to address pressing homeless issues in Santa Cruz? Kennedy prides himself on his "compassionate concern" for homeless people. Could it be the controversial "civil rights" section of the bill that denies funding for cities with anti-homeless laws on the books?

SANTA CRUZ SLEEPING BAN

Patton acknowledged that local laws — including the Sleeping Ban and Kennedy's Downtown Ordinances — which primarily affect homeless people will have to be reviewed, revised or even repealed. The Sleeping Ban makes it illegal to sleep at night between 11 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. anywhere outdoors or in a vehicle. With only 40 spaces in its emergency shelter and 1500 to 2000 homeless people in the city limits on any given night, a law against sleep is especially inhumane.

The Downtown Ordinances were largely prompted by merchant gentrification demands and police department pressure to ratify their ongoing campaign of harassing, demanding IDs, and ticketing "the unsavory."

According to Kennedy, Patton reported, City Council members did not want to put anything on the agenda that would "bring opportunity to those who would confront and embarrass them around the city's camping and sleeping bans."

Concluded Patton, "The carrot was dangled, but the prize was unavailable." Less than five days before the scheduled council meeting, Kennedy broke his word. He didn't even directly inform Patton, who only learned of the change because he scheduled a meeting with Kennedy.

STILL A CRIME TO BE HOMELESS

Bob Erlenbusch said he was disappointed but not surprised. Local activists recalled how quickly politicians' enthusiasm for human rights protection evaporates as the target population gets closer to home. A decade-old request to the local American Civil Liberties Union for a simple statement of opposition to the anti-homeless Sleeping Ban still sits in an ACLU subcommittee.

Kennedy and his City Council have declared Santa Cruz to be "a sister city" in solidarity with impoverished communities in Nicaragua, Russia, and Japan. They have declared their opposition to "Patriot Act" violations by the federal government. But they see no contradiction in keeping their own poor citizens silent, powerless, oppressed and hidden.

How liberal are the liberals of Santa Cruz? Liberal enough when posturing to the national media on Iraq, dispensing medical marijuana at City Hall, or investigating Bush for impeachable offenses. Rigidly and solidly reactionary when dealing with survival needs and the human rights of the "houseless," those who have been driven to live on the streets, in the bushes, and in vehicles by the skyhigh rents and grim Republicrat economy.

Robert Norse contributed to this article.