

MATTHEW HOY SEPTEMBER 3, 2016 3:42 PM

Democratic legislators put special interests above solving state's housing crisis



The San Luis Obispo Housing Authority is building 20 units of housing on Humbert Avenue in San Luis Obispo. Ten of those units will be for homeless veterans, with the rest slated for affordable housing. **Joe Johnston** - johnston@tribunenews.com

BY MATTHEW HOY

Wherever you go nowadays, it's commonplace to see signs advertising new housing developments.

When I make my at least once-weekly trips down the Cuesta Grade into San Luis Obispo, I see the advertisements for new homes from the "low \$500,000s." When my wife and I visit her friends and family in the Central Valley, the numbers there are commonly a lot more palatable "low \$200,000" or "low \$300,000."

Last summer, when my wife and I took a brief San Francisco vacation, I was shocked to see an advertisement for new homes there from the "low \$1,000,000s."

As anyone looking to purchase a home anywhere along the California coast from San Diego to the Bay Area can attest, housing prices are out of reach for far too many middle-class Americans.

During the latest legislative session in Sacramento, which ended last week, **Gov. Jerry Brown** pushed a proposal that would have streamlined the approval process for housing projects when developers agree to set aside 5 percent of their units as affordable housing.

As part of a carrot-and-stick strategy, Brown also linked passage of the plan to the spending of \$400 million for affordable housing across the state. (Affordable housing is needed for California's working poor but does little to help the middle class.)

Brown's fellow Democrats, largely at the behest of environmental groups and labor unions, killed the plan.

Environmental groups opposed the plan because it would have exempted qualifying projects from the California Environmental Quality Act — something that is **too often abused** by opponents of developments to wrest unrelated concessions from developers under threat of a lawsuit, rather than sincere concerns about environmental impacts.

GOV. JERRY BROWN'S PLAN TO EASE CONSTRUCTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING WOULD HAVE BARELY MOVED THE NEEDLE — BUT EVEN THOSE SMALL STEPS WERE TOO MUCH FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND LABOR UNIONS.

middle class, then artificially high labor costs, frivolous lawsuits and legal fees are good places to cut back.

In San Luis Obispo County, recent numbers from the Home Builders Association of the Central Coast demonstrate that we have work to do here as well.

Residential building permits issued the second quarter of this year **nearly matched those in 2015**. That's not nearly enough.

In San Luis Obispo, renting a two-bedroom condo can run more than \$2,000 a month, but the City Council would rather focus on intrusive inspection of existing rentals than doing all it can to increase housing stock in the city.

In Atascadero, a plan to build 200 (needed) apartments on 7 1/2 acres **earned a raspberry** from a Tribune columnist whining about the good ol' days when the community consisted of single-family homes on 1-acre lots.

Affordable housing projects alone are not enough.

Without significantly more housing options, the middle class is finding itself continually squeezed; too wealthy to qualify for the "affordable" housing set-asides, too poor to comfortably afford market-rate housing.

It's unlikely Brown's proposal was perfect. He didn't earn the nickname "Moonbeam" for nothing. But it was a sincere effort to solve one of California's biggest problems.

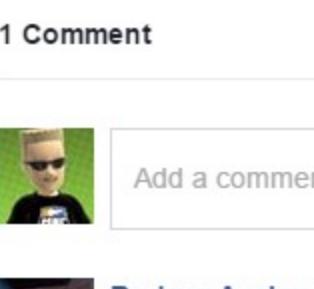
That his fellow Democrats put special interests ahead of the state's shrinking middle class is not a surprise. We continually send Democrats to Sacramento, and what do we get? Political posturing and **a new state fabric: denim**.

Housing prices won't come down — in either California as a whole or San Luis Obispo County specifically — until we achieve a better equilibrium between home construction and our population. It's a project that will likely take decades to achieve, so we should start now.

Conservative columnist Matthew Hoy is a former reporter, editor and page designer. His column appears in The Tribune every other Sunday, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks. Read Hoy's blog at Hoystory.com. Follow him on Twitter @Hoystory.

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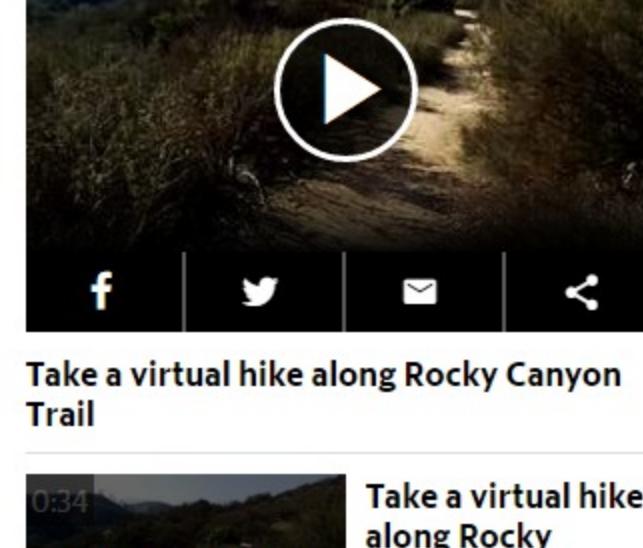
California's single family housing starts have reached their highest level since January 2008, (when Bush left office) with starts at a 30 year low. In California single family permits are up 30% while multi-family are up 68%.

Hoy's penchant for convoluting reality allows him to blame Democrats for a "middle class squeeze" which sits squarely upon the failed economic, deregulation and tax policies of Reagan and Bush Jr. eras, followed by 8 years of GOP recovery effort obstructions.

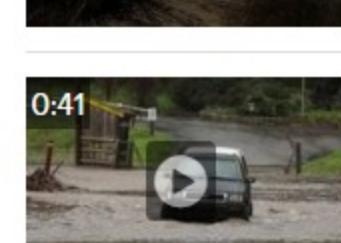
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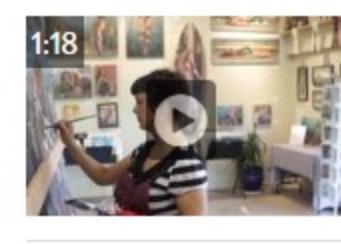
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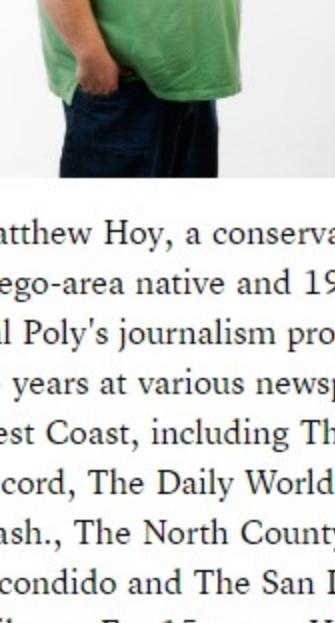
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ABOUT MATTHEW HOY



Matthew Hoy, a conservative, is a San Diego-area native and 1994 graduate of Cal Poly's journalism program. He spent 15 years at various newspapers along the West Coast, including The Lompoc Record, The Daily World in Aberdeen, Wash., The North County Times in Escondido and The San Diego Union-Tribune. For 15 years, Hoy has written a blog on politics and the media, [Hoystory.com](#). Hoy's column will be published in The Tribune every other week, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks.

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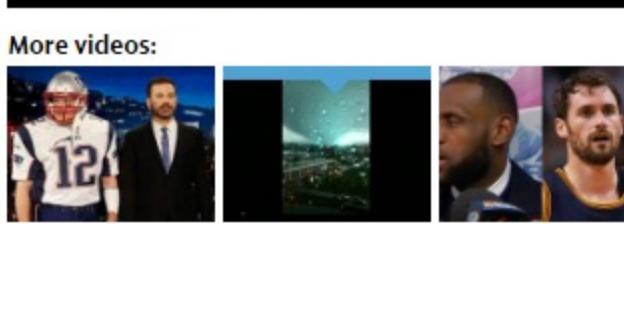
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