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California's Recipe for More Homeless

Los Angeles County tries to become a rent-free mecca.

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Tents for the homeless in Los Angeles on Dec. 6, 2022

PHOTO: FREDERIC J. BROWN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

La La Land really is paradise—at least for people who don't want to pay rent. Los Angeles County this week extended its Covid eviction ban another two months. Meantime, the Los Angeles City Council has approved rules that will make it harder for landlords to evict tenants once (and if) the county moratorium ends.

The Supreme Court struck down the Biden Administration's Covid eviction ban in August 2021, but the counties and cities of Los Angeles have extended theirs again and again even as other pandemic restrictions have lifted. The L.A. County Board of Supervisors had last extended the ban to the end of January owing to a “respiratory illness trifecta.”

Now that winter viruses are waning, progressives are invoking an epidemic of homelessness. As one activist said, “It's simple: tenant protection is homelessness prevention.” Not really. Public encampments have swelled during the county's eviction ban, and most homeless suffer from mental illness or drug addiction that requires more than a roof.

The eviction ban merely lets tenants live rent-free and not work. It's notable that L.A. County's labor force has shrunk by 275,000 during the pandemic. The moratorium has also contributed to higher rents

by restricting the supply of available housing while discouraging investment and maintenance by landlords.

Many tenants won't have paid rent for three years by the time the county's latest extension is scheduled to end. Those who have must feel like chumps. Ditto landlords who have had to keep paying property taxes, utilities, insurance and mortgage interest. The government has robbed them of income and control of their property.

Meantime, the Los Angeles City Council last week voted to approve "just-cause" eviction protections that will require landlords to pay tenants relocation assistance equal to three times the "fair market rent"—\$1,747 for a one-bedroom—plus \$1,411 in moving expenses if they raise rent by more than 10% in a year. This is rent control by another name.

As a result, many L.A. landlords won't be able to recover their losses from the three-year eviction ban. This is a recipe for fewer places to rent and more homelessness.

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