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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 It's time to demand housing as a human right

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 It may not be possible to get ahead of the homelessness
3 problem unless and until we can get the Republicans and the
4 worst of the corporate Democrats out of power

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 ON THE EVENING OF Jan. 22, I attended a vigil organized
7 for, and partially by, a small portion of the large and pretty
8 desperate unhoused population of my small county — one event
9 of six in Vermont.

10 The entire population of my county, Windham County,
11 Vermont is somewhere around 45,000 — smaller than any major

12 city. And yet, despite bitter cold winters, especially this year, we
13 have a very large and growing unhoused population.

14 An estimate by a local housing activist is that we have
15 more than 900 homeless people in our county, almost entirely
16 centered in the two towns where services are available. The rest
17 of the county is very rural, and has no shelter capacity, or place
18 for a meal. A food shelf, which many very small towns offer, is
19 not helpful if you have no place to prepare the food.

20 On that evening, we enjoyed a rare break in this winter's
21 weather. The temperature was around 30 degrees, the wind was
22 calm, and we were able to stand together in reasonable comfort,
23 listen to a few speakers (including a formerly unhoused activist
24 who has become a real community leader), a minister, the town
25 manager, a compassionate police officer, and a currently
26 homeless man.

27 The speakers memorialized a surprising number of
28 people who have died homeless in our county. (All, including the
29 homeless man, sounded a lot more coherent than the current
30 occupant of the White House.)

31 We then walked to a space, a former restaurant that has
32 been rented from a very supportive owner to be used as a
33 warming/support/arts space where hot lunches, donated warm
34 clothing, bathrooms, and shelter for rest during the daylight hours
35 are freely available. A space that exists only through community
36 donations. A space that has been strongly opposed by a
37 surprising number of selfish and shortsighted people.

38 * * *

39 AS WE WARMED UP, many of us discussed how painful this
40 moment is to anyone with a heart or a soul.

41 We had no idea if every one of those in need of a bed
42 would survive the next weekend, when temperatures were
43 predicted to plummet to below 0, to be followed immediately by
44 a major winter storm and subzero nights for the entire week to
45 follow. And there are not enough shelter beds for those who need
46 them.

47 As the unhoused speaker pointed out, the money that
48 some of us would donate for motel rooms for those who are not
49 able to find a shelter bed could be used much more efficiently if
50 we were able to purchase housing for the many who are outside
51 nightly. Funds could be pooled together for a local housing
52 solution, if we were not always in a housing emergency.

53 I live in an area with many who are always trying to get
54 in front of the housing and food emergencies of those who have
55 never been able to have stable housing and healthy food, as well
56 as those who are being deeply affected by the current crisis and
57 cuts in already inadequate emergency assistance.

58 They might be experiencing the loss of a job or health
59 benefits. They might have a physical or behavioral health
60 condition. They might be an abused spouse. So many reasons.

61 Hundreds of local residents prepare food and bring it to
62 shelters, transport for Meals on Wheels, volunteer at shelters and
63 day spaces, bring donations to food shelves, and do so much
64 more to provide emergency help.

65 * * *

66 BUT HOW do we get on top of this one-battle-after-
67 another approach we now need to take to help those who are
68 unhoused?

69 The awful truth? It may not be possible unless and until
70 we can get the Republicans and the worst of the corporate
71 Democrats out of power.

72 This coalition continues enthusiastically to pay for
73 anything except human needs.

74 They've increased the funding for an ever-growing
75 Gestapo-like ICE army of goons terrorizing the best of American
76 cities.

77 They've provided a massive tax cut for the least needy
78 people in the history of the world: the vile billionaires who can
79 now buy that one extra private yacht and pay no taxes on it. And,
80 of course, they support our bloated military budget, allowing a

81 very mentally disturbed Donald Trump to attempt to bully the
82 leaders of the world.

83 The only way to begin to get ahead of the great housing
84 emergency is for us to do whatever we can to challenge the
85 current regime: being out in the streets, pressuring Congress to
86 use what small remaining power they possess, pressing our state
87 governments to stand up to the Trump regime.

88 In the case of Vermont, we need to be working our tails
89 off to replace our complacent and complicit governor. We need
90 to participate in, and educate about, potential national
91 movements such as future general strikes or other large actions.
92 We need to write to local media or on social media.

93 Under the current system of fascist Republicans and
94 corporate Democratic "leadership," we will never see the
95 housing policy we need: billions of dollars needs to be spent, and
96 we will have those funds if we tax the wealthy and their highly
97 profitable corporations.

98 It is entirely unacceptable that so many are homeless
99 when others have three, four, five, or even more houses yet pay
100 little or no taxes.

101 As we demand health care as a human right, it is also
102 time to demand housing as a human right.

103 The federal government has abdicated that role, but it
104 does not mean we can't demand housing.

105 Now.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

106 **NANCY BRAUS** , a retired independent bookseller, is a
107 longtime activist.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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110 #####BEGIN VIDEO#####
#####END VIDEO#####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

111 #####BEGIN LOGLINE#####
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