

# The "Rooming House Paradox" Article is Preposterous

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

A recent article by Winnipeg-based housing "expert" Jino Distasio suggests that governments need to impose stricter controls on Canada's rooming houses, controls that would result in many of those establishments being shut down.

## The "Rooming House Paradox" Article is Preposterous

Mr. Distasio's theory is that the resulting spike in homeless numbers caused by such an action would force all three levels of government to take the issue seriously. As an "expert" he should already be aware that billions of dollars are being spent annually to help the homeless in Canada. The way to help them is not to make more people homeless!

Mr. Distasio is correct when he says that rooming house stock has declined over recent decades, and many of those that are left are substandard. The solution is for

governments to work with owners to improve their facilities, not shut the buildings down and throw people out on the streets. A rooming house may be modest, but it can and should be a safe and secure home. Those who live in them are not, as Mr. Distasio describes them, "hidden homeless." With such a description he perhaps shows a certain elitism in his definition of a home. It is most disconcerting that an "expert" would suggest an action that would increase homelessness instead of reducing it.

Rooming houses can be good – many still are. I lived in one in the early 1960's; the roomers all dined together, developing bonds of friendship that continue to the present with the owners' family. Mr. Distasio apparently thinks I was homeless at that time. I had no idea – I thought of my fellow roomers as my new family. I felt completely at home.

I remember when first I knocked on the door of the stately older but well-maintained house. I



The proposed Terwillegar rooming house, of Mr. Distasio's version to provide for the homeless, will cost taxpayers \$230,000 per room, free to the non-profit company but to rent at market to the tenants.



was immediately shown into and to a clean warm room. I had just turned 17, left school, left home, and started a job in Oshawa. My room and board was less than half of my minimum wage salary (equivalent to \$600-700 per month in today's dollars). It was clean, safe and affordable. My support system was the wonderful woman who owned the house plus all the other roomers, about eight or nine. We sat down together for breakfast and suppers for wonderfully home cooked meals and had enormous sandwiches bagged for our lunches at work. We celebrated birthdays and special occasions. We were family and looked after each other! When I left to join the Royal Canadian Air force, they held a going away celebration for me complete with a cake. I was not homeless, I was more at home than I could remember being for a long, long time.

What on earth has happened since? Mr. Distasio wants rooming houses shut down. Have we really changed that much as a society which used to work together to make the best out of living that we have now become a cynical spiteful social-centric community that believes that all independent living lower income people need and want 24 hour babysitter social workers and who must all live in social welfare warehouses at huge taxpayer expense?

Affordable single room rental housing is scarce in our cities, due to a large part because during the past 30-40 years rooming houses have been shut down. Those wishing to offer this form of housing have been discouraged by nimbyism, city planners, city councillors, and by the social services industry themselves. Sadly, those in the "social services" see private sector single housing units as unfair competition to the much higher cost social welfare independent living housing that provides them with jobs!



As Mr. Goldring has accurately stated, affordable single room rental housing is scarce in our cities, due to a large part because during the past 30-40 years rooming houses have been shut down.

It is true that some rooming houses are in poor repair. The government has made financial help available to owners under the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), but those who apply do so at their own risk. Private sector rooming house owners, referred also as private sector single room occupancy owner's (SRO's) in government jargon, applying for RRAP funding find themselves instead hit with health, fire, and building inspector teams, all making issues out of deficiencies, the very deficiencies the owners need the RRAP funds to correct – but the funding is seldom made available to private sector owners. Rooming house owners I have talked with are reluctant to ask for help because they



feel that such a request triggers a social industry move to shut them down.

Canada needs stable entry-level housing for its homeless population. Traditionally this has been provided not by the government but by the private sector single room occupancy unit (SRO`s) in rooming houses, older hotels, and smaller apartments.

Now for a so-called "expert" to say wiping out many remaining private sector rooming houses is appalling and irresponsible. Where would the roomers go? There is no room in homeless shelters, and a shelter space is definitely not a home. Who will pay for new housing to replace the rooming houses? Mr. Distasio? No, he wants you, the taxpayer, to pay for the housing – but he wants to run it. Many of those living in rooming houses just need a cheap place to live. They neither need nor want social workers telling them how to run their lives.

The decimation of the private sector rooming house has corresponded with the rise of a new industry. Since single-entry-level housing is practically non-existent, low income Canadians have had to turn to the state for support. The social services industry is no longer exclusively about providing support to those who need it but has become landlord to thousands whose only need is an

inexpensive place to live. The cost to the taxpayers for something that used to be the domain of the private sector is astronomical.

Taxpayer funded non-profit housing is a cash-cow for organizations. A 60 unit homeless SRO rooming house planned for Edmonton is a \$30,000 per month clear profit gold mine. A building 100% paid for by taxpayers with guaranteed monthly rent, again from taxpayers, from previously inde-

pendently living tenants, offers obscenely high profits for its non-profits.

These superbly profitable non-profit cash cows are springing up everywhere. "Experts" claim such buildings save taxpayers money – but when questioned about why the private sector is able to provide cheaper housing they run and hide, because the numbers don't lie. They may be well meaning, but they

have a vested interest in creating multi-million dollar income generators to ensure their jobs and income for their organization.

As an example, let us say a private sector rooming house were to charge a person \$1,000 per month room and board. Over ten years with the tenant paying the rent themselves, the cost to the taxpayer is zero-dollars.



Canada needs stable entry-level housing for its homeless singles population. Traditionally this has been provided not by the government but by the private sector single room occupancy unit (SRO`s) in rooming houses, older hotels, and smaller apartments.

In Edmonton the proposed Terwillegar rooming house, which would be in line with Mr. Distasio's version of providing for the homeless, will cost taxpayers \$230,000 per room to build plus taxpayer paid \$3,000 monthly for each tenant forever (and no meals like in a rooming house!). Over ten years, the cost to taxpayers is almost \$600,000! Explain to me why this social-centric wasteful approach is a better deal for Canadians!

There is no rooming house paradox, despite what Mr. Distasio asserts. There is however a "social welfare industry" rife with contradictions, a mixture of Samaritans and

villains trying to help or exploit the "homeless" because they "live in rooming houses." What utter nonsense to describe a person as homeless who is living in a rooming house! What contemptible mind set to want to move all persons from all rooming houses into social welfare warehouses at immense taxpayer costs and then to subject all of these hitherto independent living persons to social welfare dependency with unneeded and unwanted very expensive forever and ever social hand holding.

What has happened to our truly caring society and where did these callous creatures of hypocrisy come from?

**UPDATE:** On October 16th, 2013, Mr. Goldring submitted a motion in Parliament, calling on the federal government to set national standards, including: nationally recognized point in time for homeless counts taking place; nationally recognized definitions of who is homeless; nationally recognized methodology on how the count takes place, and nationally recognized criteria in determining who is homeless.

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Q1:** Do you believe that all Canadian municipalities counting their homeless population should do it on the same date and time and using the same agreed-upon criteria and methodology?

Yes       No

**Q2:** Do you agree with Mr. Goldring that conducting homeless surveys similarly to other North American jurisdictions would give governments a clearer picture of the extent of the problem?

Yes       No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
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