



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	<p style="text-align: center;">Rent control of any kind is anathema to landlord lobby</p> <p>WITH the dog days of August upon us, I was feeling mighty hot, hotter than usual, and I didn't know why. Then I opened my mail this week.</p> <p>It was a document titled "Hot Spot Summary," sent by an anonymous person at the Tri-County Apartment Association, the landlord lobby of Silicon Valley. There was my name and alleged crime against property.</p> <p>"Joe Rodriguez has made Sunnyvale a target for seeking a new rent control ordinance," the Hot Spot stated. "He reportedly has a tenant organizer identified."</p>		
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I thought to myself, I demand a correction! The truth is I don't have a tenant organizer identified. But I wish I did.

I called Kathryn Thibodeaux, CEO of the Tri-County landlord lobby, who seemed miffed that someone there had leaked the Hot Spot paper to me.

``Oh my," she said, ``you have got some long tentacles."

Hey, every journalist needs a Deep Throat, a secret source who says, ``Follow the money." In this case, it's money from the paychecks of renters into the pockets of landlords.

RENTAL RAGE is the biggest story this summer in Silicon Valley. As of June, we've seen double-digit increases at big apartment complexes drive up prices of one-bedrooms to \$1,415 in San Jose, \$1,967 in San Francisco and \$1,973 in Palo Alto-Menlo Park.

I've heard from dozens of renters like Jeff Wilde of San Jose, who received notice his rent was rising from \$1,495 to \$2,525 (Or \$200 less if he agreed to a one-year lease).

``I hope something can be done to limit the rate of rental pricing to something more reasonable," Wilde said.

That something to be done is moderate rent control, which has worked in older units in San Jose and Los Angeles and can work throughout Silicon Valley.

But rent control of any sort is anathema to Thibodeaux and the landlord lobby. They've mobilized against a rent control movement that hasn't even begun. Their ``Hot Spot Summary" lists eight ``target cities" with rumblings of rent control.

They've already sent mass mailings to government officials. They're arranging personal meetings with local politicians, preaching the twin messages that landlords can police themselves and all we have to do is build more housing.

Just to see how convincing the landlord lobby could be, I called two politicians on the Hot Spot list.

I asked Mountain View Mayor Rosemary Stasek, How does it feel to be on the landlord lobby's Hot Spot Summary?

``I don't know," she said. ``What does it say about me?"

I told her it says she told them there's no way to justify the greed she saw in the huge rent increases.

``That's 100 percent accurate," Stasek said. The average Mountain View apartment now rents for \$1,790, a 16.5 percent increase in three months.

WE TALKED some about the advantages and disadvantages of rent control. Stasek doesn't favor it, but she issued this warning to landlords:

``They have to act in enlightened self-interest," Stasek said. ``If the industry is not able to control itself in a reasonable way, then elected officials will be forced to do something."

I then called Sunnyvale Mayor Patricia Vorreiter. The average apartment rent there has reached \$1,768, a 18.3 percent increase. She doesn't favor rent control either, but she came up with an intriguing idea -- that the landlord lobby adopt a voluntary cap on annual rent increases:

``Let's have Tri-County (Apartment Association) pressure landlords into accepting a reasonable return on their investments, but not an excessive return."

I like the idea, but I don't know. Something tells me it's easier to rehabilitate prisoners than profiteering landlords. But it would be fun to watch -- wouldn't it? -- if the consequences of failure weren't so serious.

Join Joe Rodriguez in a public forum on how to keep Silicon Valley apartments affordable. Enter www.mercurycenter.com/columnists/rodriguez and follow the link to the forum.



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