

Scott Lewis (00:00:00):

Both questions. Anyone fit that Bill? Colleen, you gonna do this? All right. No, no, no. Come on. Did you stand right there? That's fine. It's like Oprah. Okay. State your name.

Attendee Colleen Cusack (00:00:21):

Colleen Cusack.

Scott Lewis (00:00:22):

What part of town do you live in?

Attendee Colleen Cusack (00:00:24):

District three North Park.

Scott Lewis (00:00:26):

North Park, okay. You, you happen to be involved in politics at the moment? I, I am understanding, correct?

Attendee (00:00:32):

Yes. I'm running for district three.

Scott Lewis (00:00:34):

How's the campaign lifestyle? It sucks. <Laugh>. I'm holding the mic up to my mouth. Right? She said it sucks. Okay. You'll have to answer this question for me. So this is okay. Like previous efforts against the tobacco companies, the manufacturers of Oxycontin and more Attorney General, Rob Bonta, our guest later today, last month, announced that he and the state of California were suing the major players in which industry for lying about what they knew about the damage that their product was causing. Humanity. Is it, are the targets of his lawsuit? A, pesticide companies, B, the inventors of pickleball, C, fossil fuel, oil and gas companies, or D, the N F L.

Attendee Colleen Cusack (00:01:44):

Oh,

Scott Lewis (00:01:45):

Pesticide. Your choices are pesticide companies, inventors of pickleball, obvious monsters, fossil fuel, oil and gas companies, or the N F L

Attendee Colleen Cusack (00:01:57):

C.

Scott Lewis (00:01:59):

It is c the fossil fuel oil and gas companies. Yes. In last month in San Francisco Superior Court, they asserted that the companies have known since at least the sixties, that burning and fossil fuels could warm the planet and change our climate, and they denied or downplayed the climate change in public statement. Everybody here for Colleen? Huh? Thank you. Yeah. Well, when he comes, he's not here, so,

all right. Do I have another one? Anyone wanna volunteer? Come on. You don't have to ask the ag a question. You do have to volunteer. Okay. Are you gonna want to ask him a question? Sure. <laugh>. All right. Alright. Stand up please. What's your name?

Attendee Colleen Cusack ([00:02:48](#)):

T Tanzi?

Scott Lewis ([00:02:49](#)):

Yes. what part of town do you live in? Golden

Attendee Colleen Cusack ([00:02:51](#)):

Hill.

Scott Lewis ([00:02:52](#)):

Okay. Are you ready? Yes. Okay. I'm going to name you five top leaders in elected office in California. Four of them, though, were first appointed to their seat, their position, not elected to it. Tell me which one Governor Gavin Newsom did not first appoint to office. Is it US Senator Alex Padilla, secretary of State and past ES star Shirley Weber. It's an important part of her title. <Laugh> US Senator La Fonza Butler, Lieutenant Governor Elany Kunaki, or Attorney General Rob Bonta. Which one was not appointed to their seat by the governor?

Speaker 3 ([00:03:48](#)):

It's either Weber or the, that other one. I can't pronounce her name.

Scott Lewis ([00:03:53](#)):

Kunaki? Yes. You got a pit. You got a pit?

Speaker 3 ([00:03:56](#)):

That one.

Scott Lewis ([00:03:59](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah, she got it. Good job. All right. I, I'm just proud I pronounced it. Well, I did that. All right. Last one. Anyone want to go? Come on. You ready? All right. These are four true or false questions. Are you ready for this? What's your name? Thomas. Thomas. Where do you live? San

Speaker 4 ([00:04:23](#)):

Yid.

Scott Lewis ([00:04:24](#)):

Okay. Welcome. Thank you. Alright. True or false, the city of San Diego, San Diego, rate payers in the city of San Diego already pay some of the highest rates for water around, but the City Council recently approved an increase of nearly 10% over the next two years. True or false? False. It's 'cause it's 20%. Huh? There we go. Look at Tomas. Huh? Guys got got no problem with this. Okay. Last year at Fest, people were really upset because the Padres were in a wild card game in the playoffs, and they were

worried they were gonna miss the game while they were watching some debate about city council or something. But despite having the third highest payroll in baseball, the Padres did not make the playoffs this year. True or false? The Padres made no major changes to leadership. No major changes to leadership after their very disappointing season.

Scott Lewis ([00:05:15](#)):

True. There we go. Look at Toma. No, you got two more. You got two more? Come on, Toma. All right. Withdrawal from drugs like fentanyl or meth can be extremely painful. And fear of that pain keeps often keeps people from even trying to go through it. For those with good health insurance, there are options, but true or false, for 1 million San Diegos who rely on Medi-Cal, Medi-Cal for health insurance, there are only 72 withdrawal management or detox beds. That is true. Our own, Lisa Halat did some great reporting on that recently. If we decided as a community that everybody should get off off these drugs and get treatment, they just simply would have no chance of getting that treatment. Good job, Tamal. One more, one more true or false. I, I love making myself laugh. True <laugh> True question. Yeah. Yeah. <Laugh>. Hello. So, yeah, true or false, the controversial housing Bill SSB 10, would allow landowners to build up to 10 units on any parcel without an environmental impact review. If the builder agrees to either A, have a public bathroom on site B, a safe and drug, safe drug injection space, or if they give out free e-bikes. True or false?

Liam Dillon ([00:06:50](#)):

Probably the E-bikes.

Scott Lewis ([00:06:51](#)):

No, I'm sorry. You got, it's just true or false if they have to. It's just a way of joking that all these bad things would be e exci or not. Bad things. False, right. Sorry, <laugh>. You got my joke, Liam. Yeah. alright everybody have a good time? Anybody have any highlights today? Feel good about, was it fun? Yes. All right, good. Thank you. So, as we wait for Bonta, I'm actually gonna flip the program and invite somebody who's special to me and special to voice. San Diego did a lot of great work here and has been representing the voice and the alumni and voice really well across the state and really across the country with his reporting. One of the things I'm most proud about, what our reporters who come to Voice I, I'm, I'm most proud about how many of them represent so well across the country. So, you know, you turn on the radio in the afternoon, you might hear Adrian, Florida in all things considered on N P R. We've got journalists at the U S A today. We've got journalists all across the country doing special things that started here. And one of those that I'm most proud of and who does some of the most exciting and interesting work all the time for the LA Times is Mr. Liam Dillon. Liam, come on up.

Liam Dillon ([00:08:17](#)):

Hello

Scott Lewis ([00:08:17](#)):

Everyone. You guys remember? Liam? Anybody remember Liam? How you been?

Liam Dillon ([00:08:23](#)):

I'm good. It's been, it's been, it's been over seven years since I was here, which

Scott Lewis ([00:08:27](#)):

Is

Liam Dillon ([00:08:27](#)):

Crazy.

Scott Lewis ([00:08:27](#)):

Yeah. Seven years since

Liam Dillon ([00:08:28](#)):

I, I left in 2016, so, really? Yes, I know. Yeah. It's a long time.

Scott Lewis ([00:08:32](#)):

Well, we had just moved into the office downtown.

Liam Dillon ([00:08:34](#)):

That's right. Yes. Uhhuh <affirmative>.

Scott Lewis ([00:08:36](#)):

So Liam

Liam Dillon ([00:08:39](#)):

You weren't that

Scott Lewis ([00:08:40](#)):

Interested in housing when you were with us. Did

Liam Dillon ([00:08:42](#)):

Not cover it for voice at all.

Scott Lewis ([00:08:45](#)):

<Laugh>, thanks. You moved on to the LA Times, correct. You do investigative work. You started kind of more at, at state level policy and

Liam Dillon ([00:08:55](#)):

Such. I, I was hired to move to Sacramento. Actually. We had LA Times has about eight or six to eight people that work out of our state capital bureau. And so I had a kind of portfolio of things and, and, you know, at the time in 2016, there was literally nobody in Sacramento covering housing. And I thought, well, why not? And so I just kind of made that one of the things that I wanted to follow, and it quickly became kind of the only thing, only thing I wanted to follow.

Scott Lewis ([00:09:18](#)):

Yeah. So you've done some great investigative work. Andrea was a big fan of the selling sunsets <laugh> invest selling Sunset

Liam Dillon ([00:09:31](#)):

Set. Yes.

Scott Lewis ([00:09:32](#)):

Was that necessary? <Laugh> you needed to correct me on that. Did you, the reality show where one of the stars the husband of one of the stars,

Liam Dillon ([00:09:42](#)):

Right, who's a reality impresario himself,

Scott Lewis ([00:09:45](#)):

Actually, why don't you tell the story? Okay.

Liam Dillon ([00:09:47](#)):

So the, the guy, I guess the show, I don't, I, I do watch Selling Sunset. I will admit, I watch Selling Sunset. I'm a little bit addicted. It's great's great television, great television. My wife doesn't like it as much as I do, but I like it. But anyway, I did not watch the husbands show, which I guess he house flips, right? Flip or flop. Tarik El El Tarek Musa. Right? And he had, I guess, gotten involved with him and his wife and a bunch of other investors to try to buy up a some properties in la in, in in, in, in North Hollywood. And they alighted on property of particular interest and doing all these videos, very reality TV star about how like, is gonna be the biggest flip of my life. And you investor can get it on the ground floor, just, you know, give us some money. And they were run all sorts of slide decks and stuff. And what the kicker of this is, what they didn't talk about for obvious reason, is that this property, that was gonna be the biggest flip of his life, and they got a great deal buying. The reason is that the guy who owned it was recently convicted of trying to arson out the tenants who were living at that property

Scott Lewis ([00:10:59](#)):

With fire,

Liam Dillon ([00:11:01](#)):

Arson fire. Yes.

Scott Lewis ([00:11:02](#)):

Well, arsons a big word around <laugh>.

Liam Dillon ([00:11:06](#)):

So they were posting eviction notices on the, on the remaining res, of which there were few residents twice,

Scott Lewis ([00:11:15](#)):

Right? There was fires twice,

Liam Dillon ([00:11:16](#)):

There was multiple fires. <Laugh>. The, the last one was what sort of the one that really did it. The guy was, and the guy, oh, the guy who was had the arson additionally was, was recently convicted of hiring a hitman to, to kill a rival like his lawyer in a previous thing. So this guy, you know, I mean, quite a, so this is why this property's on the market is because you have a, they he tried to burn down, burn out his residence. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:11:39](#)):

Yeah.

Liam Dillon ([00:11:39](#)):

So

Scott Lewis ([00:11:39](#)):

Liam has a way of angering people <laugh> with some of his reporting. This guy was kind of angry, right?

Liam Dillon ([00:11:46](#)):

Kind of not really. It,

Scott Lewis ([00:11:48](#)):

He kind of subtweet a little bit.

Liam Dillon ([00:11:49](#)):

I got blocked on Instagram,

Scott Lewis ([00:11:50](#)):

Which, you know, <laugh>,

Liam Dillon ([00:11:52](#)):

There are worse things in life. Yes.

Scott Lewis ([00:11:54](#)):

But you've, you've had a lot of some touchy sub subjects going on. One of the things though that you've followed, I thought has been fascinating over the last little while has been developers who are sort of circumventing their local development restrictions using the laws that the state has passed to, to make it possible for them to build things without having to conform to the local restrictions on

Liam Dillon ([00:12:21](#)):

That. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:12:22](#)):

Tell me some of the stories involved there and what, what's actually happening. So

Liam Dillon ([00:12:25](#)):

This has been really interesting and a nice kind of arc for, for me and my reporting where I feel like I have this kind of sweet spot for what I

Scott Lewis ([00:12:31](#)):

Sort of know, right?

Liam Dillon ([00:12:32](#)):

So as I mentioned, I was in Sacramento for about three and a half years where I covered a lot of the initial legislation that was passed, sort of designed in a sense to make it easier to build sort of writ large and also harder for local governments to say no, the projects right. Sort of streamline the process. And there is this sort of, and now I was there for three and a half years, and now I'm in LA where I write mostly about sort of neighborhood level issues that kind of interact with policy that's going on around the state. And so, you know, there were these batteries, like over a hundred laws passed from 2017 forward, designed again to kind of make it easier to build and also keep local governments from saying no. And there's this sort of crop.

Liam Dillon ([00:13:16](#)):

And I, I found a guy in LA really interesting who particularly on parcels that were zoned single family home only could only previously have built a single family home, found this sort of way to put together like a half dozen of these laws to essentially he would argue, you know, build big condos and local government can't say no. And so it's just this really interesting kind of methodology where developers almost exclusively used to have to rely on their relationships with city council members or whomever to kind of get the grease to get their projects through. And there's this sort of increasing kind of group of developers including this guy in, in, in LA that, that I'm mentioning who are really trying to rely on these new sort of rights that they've been granted by cities to be able to say, you know oh, you say no, well then you'll see me in court and look, the law says I have a good chance of winning.

Scott Lewis ([00:14:14](#)):

Has there been have the cities found ways to fight back, or are they just kind of saying like, wow, this guy's really clever, good job,

Liam Dillon ([00:14:22](#)):

<Laugh>? No, I mean, they're, they're setting up these court battles. And this is the sort of thing where like, because these laws are so new, then it is unclear what the ultimate arrangement is. And it is like, it, it is also very fact specific. You know, one of the laws, there's this kind of very scary term called the builder's remedy, which I guess there may be communities in San Diego that are where this would apply. But it essentially says, you know, every eight years, every city in the state has to put forward a housing blueprint that says, we will allow for X amount of number of new units in our community. And the state has to say that's good

Scott Lewis ([00:14:57](#)):

Enough, right?

Liam Dillon ([00:14:57](#)):

So, you know 400 units for a smaller city, maybe up to like a, you know,

Scott Lewis ([00:15:02](#)):

A few

Liam Dillon ([00:15:02](#)):

Hundred thousand, right? Or even or more in la. And if a city's out of compliance with that so that the state has not signed off, or their, their project or their, their blueprint's not good, then a developer could come in and say, oh, on this particular parcel, I want to use the builder's remedy. That means as long as I set aside a certain amount of portion of my development for low income or, or entirely moderate income, you, I want to build this. And you can't say no, but there's all these weird, like, well, is it when the city council passes the blueprint, does this kind of say that you're no longer eligible for the builder's remedy? Is it when the state says it's okay? Is it when like the state says it's okay, and the city council comes back to affirm the fact that city says it's okay. So it's all these sort of timeline things that are not quite spelled out, and that's what these sort of developers are testing these kind of like, kind of new rights that they've been granted do.

Scott Lewis ([00:15:55](#)):

Does it feel like those laws were passed as a, they intending to just be a threat as opposed to being used like this is this like, they're like not ready because they, they weren't ever meant to be used. Right?

Liam Dillon ([00:16:09](#)):

So I am not aware, and this is all relatively new, but I'm not aware of, and I may be wrong 'cause I don't follow this religiously of one builder's remedy project that is actually broken ground anywhere in the state. And someone may call me out on

Scott Lewis ([00:16:20](#)):

That, and that's fine. I would like

Liam Dillon ([00:16:22](#)):

To be educated. But there was a circumstance I did write about in, in Santa Monica, in LA a developer there who owned a lot of land, proposed like 5,000 units under this plan. And this, the city was sort of what do we do? It's sort of risky on both sides. And what they did was they came to an agreement with the developer and said, we're gonna process your projects X amount percent faster. We're gonna resolve some other litigation that you have, and you're gonna pump you to the front of the line and, and then you'll just withdraw your applications. And that's what the, ultimately the end of the day the developer wanted was we could get some advantage that he wasn't going to get otherwise, that was good enough and, you know, more solid than trying to go to courts, which risky and could take years, but the threat sort of had to be there or else the city could have very easily called the bluff. And that's not really what happened in that circumstance. Hmm.

Scott Lewis ([00:17:15](#)):

You mentioned your wi, I'd like to give a shout out to my wife Ashley and my daughter Ruby. Hello, Ruby. Thanks for coming. I was very excited I did that. Let's talk about another thing. So one of the causes or sort of events that led to our housing crisis, our homelessness crisis has been the just absolute destruction of single room occupancy hotels. It's almost like we've created a system where there's no last rung of the ladder anymore, of just, you know, of, of places that people could go. And you,

throughout history, or at least you know, modern history, there's always been boarding homes or, or these kind of places that people could at least find shelter could at least find affordable places to stay. I think the number I'm sure Lisa has the exact number.

Scott Lewis ([00:18:11](#)):

She here thousands of of units. How many? 3000? 10,000. 10,000. It's debated. It's debated. Debated. Okay. Thanks Lisa <laugh> there's thousands and thousands of units were destroyed in San Diego. And it, and a lot of people see a direct line between that and the homelessness crisis. You've done a lot of reporting in LA and and issues around the state about some of the things that go along with single room occupancy. So even if you want to try to run things right now as a ss ss r o you know, it's, it's pretty hard. Can you tell us some of the things you've found?

Liam Dillon ([00:18:49](#)):

Yeah, so I've been distributing a lot of reporting in Skid Row. And I sort of feel, honestly, as a housing reporter in California, if you don't

Scott Lewis ([00:18:56](#)):

Describe Skid Row for

Liam Dillon ([00:18:57](#)):

Skid Row is a, is like a, a contained area that's been sort of set up by various powers that be in Los Angeles many years ago to essentially quite literally contain the homelessness crisis in la. And the idea was, as you know similar to many other discriminatory laws, was to basically put a population that, that wealthier and frankly whiter members of LA society did not wanna see in a particular place so they wouldn't have to see them. And, you know it's sort of a, a moral stain on I think this country that places like Skid Row exist in terms of how they were created and, and this app really immense human suffering that goes on daily, hourly, every minute there. So there is a lot of this kind of singular occupancy housing in Skid Row.

Liam Dillon ([00:19:51](#)):

And the largest landlord in, in Skid Row was an organization called a Skid Row Housing Trust. And they sort of made their name in the nineties by buying up these old and they're nonprofit landlords. They would rely on tax credits and other sorts of, you know subsidy funding to, to do their projects, buy up these old SROs re refurb, refurbish them. And then more recently with the rise of housing first policies, pair them with supportive services. Well, you know, 30 years on these SROs are in need of another rehab and there was not money there to do them. And, you know, the business model essentially became broken. So much so that the earlier this year, the landlord financially collapsed. They don't exist any, well, they barely exist. They are into receivership because of all sorts of problem.

Liam Dillon ([00:20:45](#)):

I mean, awful plumbing problems. Service goes away just really unlivable. I was in one a couple weeks ago, really unlivable sorts of spaces, and in some ways this was the flagship housing provider in Skid Row 2000 units. And, you know, LA's homelessness crisis is awful. San Diego is, is too, you can't lose these sorts of last restored housing without a huge domino effect on the rest of the homeless population in, in the community. And the big fear is if this business model for pairing services with these sorts of buildings can't function, can economically function, then you're, this is almost like a canary in a coal

mine situation, which is these, these, these nonprofit providers are gonna continue to fail and then that's going to simply take units offline when everyone is desperately centered on trying to, trying to add units.

Scott Lewis ([00:21:35](#)):

So what are they gonna do?

Liam Dillon ([00:21:36](#)):

Great question. They don't know. There is, they own 29 properties, some of the newer ones they're trying to fix up to the extent that they can transition over to

Scott Lewis ([00:21:45](#)):

Other non-profit

Liam Dillon ([00:21:46](#)):

Housing providers. But there's about a dozen, and they're all these SROs, right? Sro, you know common bathrooms often no kitchens, very small units, but also you can rent, you can rent them, you know, pretty affordably compared to what, what, you know, what else is on the market. There's about a dozen of these that are solely owned by the trust, and they quite literally don't know what to do with them. I spoke with the head of the LA housing department last week, and basically the plan now is write up a plan to ask the state for money. I mean, that's the plan. The

Scott Lewis ([00:22:18](#)):

Plan is to just to get plan.

Liam Dillon ([00:22:20](#)):

Plan is to plan for a bailout

Scott Lewis ([00:22:21](#)):

To plan. Yeah. Okay. Well that's depressing.

Liam Dillon ([00:22:25](#)):

Yes.

Scott Lewis ([00:22:27](#)):

Let me ask you one other thing. So there's a lot of movement in San Diego for some big investments in, in subsidized housing. There's a mansion tax being I guess a high value transaction tax. Yeah. There's

Liam Dillon ([00:22:42](#)):

One in LA that just passed. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:22:44](#)):

Yeah. And so this is a little, they're trying to learn some lessons from LA and do it better. It's like progressive. Yeah. It'll make a little more progressive also allow new construction to be exempted from it so that they don't have to worry about that. And there's, you know, a push for, for this,

Liam Dillon ([00:23:02](#)):

LA did see some

Scott Lewis ([00:23:03](#)):

Just rather large things like the, the, the transaction tax the housing bond. And there were just a lot of public investments going on in housing there. And think there was a sense that it didn't make a difference or it hasn't made a difference yet, and it, and it caused a lot of cynicism. Is that fair?

Liam Dillon ([00:23:23](#)):

Yes. And I think that goes

Scott Lewis ([00:23:26](#)):

Back to, I think

Liam Dillon ([00:23:27](#)):

I heard one of the earlier

Scott Lewis ([00:23:29](#)):

Panels

Liam Dillon ([00:23:29](#)):

Discussing it's the same problem in LA as it is in San Diego. It is in the Bay Area that you just, you are housing everyone's housing a lot of people, but there are more people who are falling into homelessness than people are being housed. And so even, yeah, I mean, there are thousands of new permanent supportive housing, homeless housing units that are being built in la but homelessness is getting worse. And so I think in many respects, the, the public rightfully says, well, I just approved X amount of billion dollars. Yeah, this building's go up, but it's not solving the problem. So why should I continue to, to, to support that? I think, you know, a few years ago I did do, and this is something that I, I sort of keep harping on. 'cause I think it's really, really important when we're talking about building low income and homeless housing, is that you know, the cost to build it is exorbitant. You know, I wrote about a project the story ran in early 2020. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:24:19](#)):

And the

Liam Dillon ([00:24:19](#)):

Feature project was in Solana Beach. A a what became a 10 unit affordable housing project would cost it ended up imploding because of the cost, but a million dollars a unit. Right. and now it

Scott Lewis ([00:24:33](#)):

Was just a story the other day about Skyline and Rancho Bernardo \$980,000. Really?

Liam Dillon ([00:24:39](#)):

Here.

Scott Lewis ([00:24:39](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Liam Dillon ([00:24:40](#)):

So since then, I mean, I did a story last summer or the a half dozen, and this is the one in the Salona Beach fell apart. But the, there was a half dozen in the Bay Area that were getting, this was last summer that we had gotten money and were under construction underground, where they were over a million a unit. And, you know, there's a lot of, yeah, like, like, you know, the government can't control what the price of wood is or whatever, right. Or what interest rates are, but they can control a lot about what goes into the cost of building low income housing. And you know, it's just obvious if the, the, the, you can't stretch the dollar if it costs this much to cost as much to build. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:25:19](#)):

How you feeling? You feeling strong? I'm good. Okay.

Liam Dillon ([00:25:22](#)):

Yeah. Can

Scott Lewis ([00:25:22](#)):

You grab those two chairs over there? <Laugh>, <laugh>,

Liam Dillon ([00:25:26](#)):

Like, like one arm each? Like is that what you want? Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:25:29](#)):

What however you want. Okay. <Laugh>. Alright.

Liam Dillon ([00:25:44](#)):

You just had to do that, huh? I was gonna say, I'll just know for the record, I did it to it once and you

Scott Lewis ([00:25:48](#)):

You

Liam Dillon ([00:25:48](#)):

Did.

Scott Lewis ([00:25:49](#)):

Yeah, no, I saw it. Yeah. We used to have pushup contest. Did have pushup contest. Yes. Leah Lisa loved that <laugh>. That was a big fan of that. Okay. Scott,

Liam Dillon ([00:26:01](#)):

What the low income housing, what's

Audience member 1 ([00:26:04](#)):

Gonna prevent us from building what we torn down that was built in the fifties and sixties, the low income

Scott Lewis ([00:26:10](#)):

Housing project that just turned into, just had a random question from the audience for the, it's a live podcast, so I gotta speak in. So what's gonna prevent us from rebuilding what was already there? No

Audience member 1 ([00:26:22](#)):

Rebuilding the old, you too young for this, but the old

Scott Lewis ([00:26:26](#)):

In low income housing in the major <crosstalk>. Oh, like the, the, so you,

Liam Dillon ([00:26:28](#)):

You're asking about public housing and Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:26:30](#)):

So

Liam Dillon ([00:26:31](#)):

What, what, what, so what, I guess is your question. What lessons did we learn from that, that keep that from, from happening, from happening again? Well, I think, you know, you can't tell the story of public housing without telling the story, story of how public housing through discriminatory laws became, you know, it was a, a racist scenario where, you know, a lot of the original public housing developments there were in, they were integrated and they were a lot of white people who were living in them once. Once suburbanization allowed, again, a largely white population to get low interest loans or to be able to buy houses and move to the suburbs, those those housing projects, they defacto became segregated and became extremely less resorted housing for the poorest people. And so that system, I think is an extra linked with what I, the, the ultimate decline of what public housing was.

Liam Dillon ([00:27:26](#)):

Right. And so I think one way to not do that again, is to simply not do that. Right. and I think, you know, there's a lot of ideas about how potentially, you know, having mixed income communities, I mean, there's a lot of like, like, you know, defacto, there's not a lot of difference between public housing buildings and what you see as what are affordable housing buildings right now in terms of the amount, the income that folks have to make to live in them. And so if there's no problem with that, then I don't think necessarily switching it to being strict public housing where the government owns and operates would be any different than than, than than what exists right now.

Scott Lewis ([00:28:07](#)):

And I believe on your ballot in a year, there will be a public housing mandate.

Liam Dillon ([00:28:12](#)):

There is a measure on, I, I've written a little bit about this. There's a very uniquely, California has a provision in its constitution that is anti-public housing that was passed during the Red Scare in the fifties. Also discriminatory at the time the realtors group who, which behind it had a policy in their code of ethics of all things that said, we will not integrate neighborhoods. Like that was their code of ethics. We

Scott Lewis ([00:28:37](#)):

Will not integrate

Liam Dillon ([00:28:38](#)):

It. We will not integrate neighborhoods. That was their, their code of ethics in the, in the fifties at the time, they sponsored an issue that said if you want public housing in a community, there has to be a local public vote for it. And so that obviously stymied the development of, of public housing. They, they've certainly through the first 20 years that was in effect there've been some ways to get around it. It's not quite dead letter like that. It still affects things. But yes, there is currently a provision that would be voted on next year statewide, that would remove what's now known as Article 34 from the Constitution, which would allow essentially public housing to be treated like every other kind of housing.

Scott Lewis ([00:29:18](#)):

And just to be clear about the distinction, public housing fully operated and, and run Correct. Funded by the government as opposed to this subsidy system. Yeah. Correct.

Liam Dillon ([00:29:27](#)):

Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:29:28](#)):

Okay. I'd like to invite a couple people first to just one to start. So she is our TikTok star, rising TikTok star. She's a environment reporter. She will give you advice on how to keep your green bin from becoming a pit to hell <laugh>. It's I, I, does anybody take their, their organics out and just like, open that and put it away? It's terrifying. Put she's a very special person who did a great job today pulling a lot of really interesting people together to talk about water the Colorado River and all the issues that are involved with the future of our civilization in the, in the Western United States. And I'm very excited to bring her up. Mackenzie Elma, come on up, actually. Why don't you scoot over Mackenzie?

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:30:25](#)):

Oh, this

Scott Lewis ([00:30:26](#)):

Is like, like, like the talk show? Like a talk show's. A talk show. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:30:28](#)):

Wow. <Laugh>

Scott Lewis ([00:30:30](#)):

Bon's got me all screwed up. I'm doing the best.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:30:33](#)):

Doing great. You're doing great. I thought I was like, TikTok star. I was like, ah, Andrea's next for sure. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:30:37](#)):

But

Scott Lewis ([00:30:38](#)):

Okay. She's okay. You're, you're, you're a little better.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:30:42](#)):

Wow. I, no comment. I'm gonna stay away from that.

Scott Lewis ([00:30:45](#)):

What do you think about today's Colorado River recession? I was a little disappointed that they didn't figure out how to divide up what remains of the Colorado River. That

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:30:54](#)):

Was what I asked them to do before they got here. But yeah, unfortunately it sounds like they didn't do their homework.

Scott Lewis ([00:31:00](#)):

I'm still fascinated. Can I just express, so I didn't really articulate this really well when, when I asked the question or when I reflected the reader's question or the audience question, but I find it the law of the river is this, this, like you described this very complex series of Supreme Court decisions, just mutual compacts treaties, all kinds of stuff about who has rights to the Colorado River. And it just feels like it's this, this agreement that humans can change their mind eventually. And, and like they said in Australia, the, the, the, the country just decided like, yeah, this rule you have about how to use this water, it's out the window because you guys haven't figured it out and we don't have enough water. Everything's falling apart. And I, I feel like the tenuousness of this, of this system of, you know Imperial Valley having the first access to the water of us now buying that access or part of it from them, it just all feels like it's built on this, on this rule of law that yes, we're, I'm really excited about the rule of law and I hope it stays intact, but it does feel like it could be bullied really easily.

Scott Lewis ([00:32:07](#)):

Did you pull up any insight about about the situation and, and just, you know, what they're gonna do to make sure that, that it can continue to survive as an agreement?

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:32:20](#)):

Yeah. Well it's, I think it's very com because it's so complex and it's creation, it's very complex process to potentially undo. I don't, I don't know if that's what, that doesn't seem to be what's on the table, but

kind of what, what lesson I learned from going to the Colorado River Water Users Association and they hold this like, big conference in Caesar's Palace at Las Vegas, and all these water Colorado River people come and make negotiations over the slot machines. They, the, the whole system is sort of set up to not be about conservation. It's like the water is mine and then if I don't use it, I lose it. And so it's, it's not really a system that's like set up to say, oh, let's share, or, oh, you know, even though I think that's what we're trying to do because we're being forced to do it.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:33:07](#)):

And I think the biggest example of this was the American Indian tribes that really were like given water rights, and I'm using quotes here, but not, not many of them were, you know, supported financially to be able to develop stuff to use the water. So they just, a lot of the water that they have rights to just sort of flows through the system down to the next user. So it's gonna take a lot of unpacking to kind of like, make sure everybody has enough to survive and then survive in quotes again. 'cause It means, you know, survive what agriculture survive. Or like people who need drinking water in San Diego survive. That's the big question we have on the table. I

Scott Lewis ([00:33:45](#)):

Don't know if y'all picked up on this, but I thought it was really interesting where Adele from the GM of the Metropolitan Water District was here, and he was talking about how when the drought started to really hit its peak, the last one I guess a year and a half ago before the rains came there was a severe cutback for some of the Metropolitan Water District customers in the LA area. And we were protected. San Diego was protected from that because of this purchase of water that we had gotten, or partly because of this purchase of water we had made from Imperial Valley. And I thought it was like, it was just really interesting to see the tables kind of turn where Metropolitan felt itself vulnerable because of the drought where it was the, the drought that, that in the nineties that they were experiencing.

Scott Lewis ([00:34:41](#)):

And when Metropolitan was cutting back on San Diego, that caused us to panic to do all this work to get more water in. But I, I, I, I think that that was a, a really interesting moment. And it was also really awkward to know that that had happened. And the, and the San Diego guy was here saying like, yeah, we, we were okay because we'd bought this water, but you bought it from the Imperial Valley. It's not like we had more, you know, and, and, and the, the exchange of that was that there, there was a public health crisis brewing in Imperial County. Do you, do you sense that the water authority is gonna make good on its promise that the whole Southern California's gonna make good on its promise to take care of the people in Imperial County and the Salton Sea?

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:35:26](#)):

Well, I, I mean, I feel like Imperial Valley, you know, they're gonna be very protective of, of further cuts, but I think they're also showing that they're first to step up to the plate to offer water, to, to, to reduce their use and conserve. And that's kind of what we saw. Like when the federal government was like, everybody needs to cut. Like somebody's gotta do it. And then Imperial Valley did step forward and say, okay, we volunteer X amount, like we're gonna do it. So I, I mean, I guess, I don't know, the, the problem that we face and that California keeps talking about is the Salton Sea. It's like if we keep cutting at one place, maybe Imperial Valley, like what are we gonna do other than just like build a big pipeline from the ocean to like fill the salt and sea so that doesn't turn into this massive, like, air pollution problem in the middle of the desert. So I think that's kind of what you're getting at. Yeah. And that still remains to be

solved. I mean, it's not getting better over there, as we've heard from Michael Cohen who came and visited us.

Scott Lewis ([00:36:17](#)):

Okay. I'm gonna bring somebody else up. <Laugh>, she's she's okay at TikTok <laugh>. She's okay at podcasting. She's pretty good at a lot of things. She's been a great managing editor over the last two years now. Right. And and a great fellow podcast host for me. And I've been very excited to collaborate with her Andrea Lopez via Fanya Lopez. Come on up. <Inaudible>.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:36:54](#)):

Wow. Wow.

Scott Lewis ([00:36:55](#)):

I'm just shooting. Is Rob Bonta here yet? Or <laugh> <laugh>. Oh, hello. No, <laugh>. Okay. Hey,

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:37:03](#)):

I'm good at everything.

Scott Lewis ([00:37:04](#)):

You are really good at everything. Yeah. so you just, I didn't get to see it, but you just got to moderate the panel about the cost of water. So one of the consequences of all these water deals we've made is the rate payers in San Diego have had to shell out a ton of money to make these transfers possible, to do desal, to do all these things. And all of that cost of water has made two water agencies decide they want to leave San Diego. It looks like they are going to leave San Diego the water authority and join the Metropolitan Water District through a different agency. And part of the reason is 'cause of the cost. They say they can get a lot cheaper water and they can from the Metropolitan Water District. You had one of them debate one of the board members of the Water Authority about the cost of water. I wish I could have seen it, but I was doing another debate about the housing stuff. How'd it go? Yeah.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:37:58](#)):

Things going on. Yeah. Well, Mackenzie was there, which made me extra nervous because she

Mackenzie Elmer ([00:38:04](#)):

<Laugh> because

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:04](#)):

Our expert, it

Mackenzie Elmer ([00:38:05](#)):

Was a SmackDown. Scott, you didn't mention it was a smack Yeah, it

Scott Lewis ([00:38:07](#)):

Water smack. So SmackDown cost of water SmackDown. Yeah. I

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:10](#)):

Would say it was a friendly SmackDown,

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:38:12](#)):

Maybe. Well, you

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:13](#)):

Know, there, it could've gotten crazier. I also it was a mistake of mine, but I ended the piano early. I got confused with

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:38:19](#)):

The time, so we probably

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:20](#)):

Could've, you know, I'm

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:38:22](#)):

Sure there

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:23](#)):

More smacks <laugh>. But yeah, I mean, it was interesting, right? So I was joined by Nick Serrano, he's the vice chair of the San Diego County Water Authority. He represents the city of San Diego rate payers. And Jack Bebe, who is general manager of Fallbrook Fallbrook Public Utility Utilities District.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:38:44](#)):

Geez, <laugh>.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:38:45](#)):

And, you know, obviously he represents one of the districts that's trying to leave the San Diego County Water Authority. And yeah, I mean, it, it was fascinating. I think, like Jack pointed out how, you know, he's doing things in the best interest of his rate payers and they're just paying too much, and he just, he's tried to have conversations going back several years about, you know, what we can do, like we're suffering. We don't benefit from all these infrastructure investments that you've made as a water authority. And, you know, just trying to like, come to the table. At least that was what he was saying. And so now they're at the point where they're gonna leave and Yeah. I don't know what you meant. Well,

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:39:29](#)):

It's interesting that that happened after this panel about the Q S A, because we were here celebrating how great the Q S A was to save San Diego and have a bunch of water through the drought. And then I,

Liam Dillon ([00:39:39](#)):

I don't know what The Q S A is.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:39:40](#)):

Oh my gosh, that's right. Well, I can't believe I threw out an acronym. Basically the big California water deal that San Diego made to buy water from Imperial Valley farmers. Thank you, Liam. Yes. and but in the cost of water SmackDown, you know, there were like, Nick was saying, well, we, we need to look at our investments, like maybe we should get rid of this water. You know, that's kind of what I think what he

Scott Lewis ([00:40:00](#)):

Nick Said that?

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:40:00](#)):

I think there was an allusion to that, and there's been an allusion to that for some time now, is like, maybe we should look at some of these deals we made that are quite expensive and have like, kind of locked us into buying expensive water. Do we really need it? Because now we're recycling all of our water, which San Diego,

Scott Lewis ([00:40:14](#)):

I, I think that's a really interesting point because I think that he and others are really excited about the water authority continuing to build things, but maybe not buy more water. Right? Like they're, and I think in large part, they have a lot of labor allies that wanna build those things. I think there's a lot of people who want to make more investments. And I think that's part of what concerns them about the two agencies that are leaving. Because if the two agencies leave others, it might be an indication that the investment frenzy is over. And maybe they wanted to build some more things before that.

Andrea Lopez-Villafañá ([00:40:52](#)):

Yeah, I mean, it was interesting because obviously they're, you know, in one way, like they're on different sides, right? Of the argument. Jack representing a group that wants to leave Nick, you know, representing a group that wants them to stay. But they were both in agreement about these investments and whether they should be looking at these investments. I think Jack was called it insurance, right? And like, you have a lot of insurance. Do you're really need all of that insurance? Let's talk about that. Right? And so it was interesting that they kind of agreed it, it was funny that they were agreeing so much.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:41:25](#)):

So I was like,

Andrea Lopez-Villafañá ([00:41:25](#)):

All right, let's get into the spice. I

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:41:27](#)):

Think it would've been a little bit more smack smacky if we're a couple months prior when

Andrea Lopez-Villafañá ([00:41:31](#)):

I thought so too. Yeah.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:41:32](#)):

But right now I think they're all talking about how to kind of move forward, but it's still smell pretty spicy still, I thought.

Jakob McWhinney ([00:41:40](#)):

Alright.

Scott Lewis ([00:41:41](#)):

I just got a text from the Attorney General not him, but there are people, and they said that he's on his way, but he will be here just before five, so it's another 12 minutes. Can we do this? We can do this, right? 12 minutes. Should you just FaceTimeing you still wanna hear from him and Liam and the question. All right. Well he's a showman. He's a musician. He didn't want to sing the national anthem for me today. It's fine. As other duties assigned didn't fit that. He's also I think the premier education reporter in San Diego, and he's been a great member of the pod team. I'd like to welcome up Jacob McQuin. Let's have you

Jakob McWhinney ([00:42:28](#)):

Wow. Given up your chair. Very, very gracious of you.

Scott Lewis ([00:42:31](#)):

I got a whole system here, <laugh>. So are there any of my note takers, right? Raise your hand if you've been taking notes for some of these sessions. We got students out here doing the work. I gave 'em a little pep talk about doing journalism and one of the basic things that we try to teach our journalists is that if they think something's interesting, they have to trust themselves enough to believe that other people will as well. It's the, it's the hardest skill it's journalists have to develop because it really is a, a confidence thing. And Liam's never lacked for that. So, <laugh> I don't think Lopez has ever lacked for that, but some people do go for that. And so I, that was the main lesson I gave them is if they were in some of these sessions to try to write down something that they thought was interesting because it probably would be an indication that others thought that was interesting as well. So you got to watch several of these sessions. You got to, you know, walk around and see some of these things. You worked with some of these note takers. What stood out to you? Anything?

Jakob McWhinney ([00:43:39](#)):

I, you know, I, I think there are a lot of people who really like water here. That's, that's, that's fairly clear. And I, I like it too. I mean, I think Gatorade is a little better, but, but, but you know, water is clearly one of the issues of our time. And it, it's, it's very interesting to see all of the different sites. I mean, that's one thing that really stood out, right? We have Imperial Valley worrying about public health crises. We have Fallbrook worrying about prices. We have San Diego worrying about capacity and new building. And, and that's, that's been something that's incredible to see all of the, the gathering of, of these sort of, you know, water egghead all in one place. It's been pretty interesting. Yeah.

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:44:23](#)):

Did we succeed then, Jacob? I remember in the newsroom you were kinda, not to out you, but you were kinda like, I don't know how this is relevant to me, this Colorado River stuff, and, you know, and I was

like, if I'm not gonna make it relevant to Jacob. And now it seems like it's true. Well, well no one's building a school on the Colorado River, and so, oh,

Liam Dillon ([00:44:39](#)):

Okay. Well, maybe

MacKenzie Elmer ([00:44:40](#)):

Not relevant to my p Fair enough. <Laugh>.

Scott Lewis ([00:44:43](#)):

Well I would like to excuse you now. Thank you <laugh>. Everybody. Let's hear it for the podcast team. Liam.

Liam Dillon ([00:44:58](#)):

Do, do you want me to carry the chairs way?

Scott Lewis ([00:45:00](#)):

Yeah, do two more chairs. We could do

Liam Dillon ([00:45:01](#)):

Yeah,

Scott Lewis ([00:45:05](#)):

We're, we're concerned about stage set up here. <Laugh>. Okay. But he's he's the attorney general and he came in just to speak to you all and to endure Liam Dillon's questions. So we're very grateful for him making the trip and coming here. I'd like to welcome up to the stage Attorney General, Rob Bonta. Thank you. Okay. I'm gonna hand the stage over to you, sir.

Liam Dillon ([00:45:47](#)):

Sounds great.

Scott Lewis ([00:45:48](#)):

Good luck.

Liam Dillon ([00:45:49](#)):

Okay. <laugh> how's your flight? Good. Finally got here a little late to start, but foggy. That's, I hear it's the foggy, but it's the fog. It's is San Diego Fog, and That's right. Not the Bay Area fog. This time we're not to blame, so, but we made it here. Excited to be here. Yes. Thanks for accommodating me. So welcome pleasure to talk to you again. I, I wanted to start you're from the Bay Area by, by some accounts face California's immense south challenges statewide, but some accounts faced it first. And before you became ag you were a state legislator where housing was one of your top priorities. In fact you'll correct me if I'm wrong, but you were the author of a bill that that would ultimately ended up getting a version of it passed where a tenants would have to be if they were going to be evicted, had to

have a cause, so not paying rent or any other lease violation that was not a state law until it was your bill that was a part of that package getting passed.

Liam Dillon ([00:46:51](#)):

And I'm curious how much of your background as a legislator has informed what you do now in your, in your current role? Yeah. Well, first of all, thank you all for the opportunity to, to join you. I'm excited to be here and, and appreciate the conversation, the focus on housing. And we all know when it comes to housing, we're in a full on state of emergency, state of crisis. We need to use all the tools in the toolbox, everything in our power to move the needle and make a difference. And for, for me, I, I, I feel it's a huge advantage to have the experience of being a legislator for almost a decade and, and, and serving in, in, in Sacramento,

Rob Bonta ([00:47:30](#)):

Representing an incredible district that I'm very proud of anchored in Oakland, Alameda, and San Leandro, where a lot of the, the pushes for building more housing, for protecting tenants really picked up steam and build momentum. And so having the experience to be involved in some of the, the biggest fights, and, and AB 1482, what you referenced was the strongest tenant protection law ever passed in the state of California, the strongest in the United States. It has anti rent gouging and it has just cause eviction protections. And assembly member David Chu, now city attorney and I teamed up at, at the time to make that happen. City Attorney

Liam Dillon ([00:48:03](#)):

In San Francisco, city

Rob Bonta ([00:48:04](#)):

Attorney in San Francisco, and a a, a huge housing warrior and champion. And, and so, you know, I cut my teeth in the legislature on, on all these issues. And, and as a legislator, you have a, a blank palate you can introduce and propose any law that you think needs to be introduced. You can seek to remove and eradicate any unjust law or unfair law or law with unintended consequences. The, my new role is different and I, I really love the executive branch. I'll say we have a lot of opportunity to enforce and move quickly and, and with force and authority, and we have a lot of tools to, to, to, to work with in terms of enforcing the law. So all my views on homelessness, tenant protections, housing production were developed in the legislature. And, you know, being in the middle of some of the biggest debates with our, and then having colleagues in the legislature and, and in the governor's office has been very helpful as well. So

Liam Dillon ([00:48:59](#)):

That, a nice segue to my, what I wanna talk about next, which is there have been a lot of new housing laws that have been passed over the last six, seven years. Some of them gave your office more powers to enforce

Liam Dillon ([00:49:09](#)):

These laws even created a new unit within your office to monitor local governments. You kind of gave them a kind of a marvelous names housing justice, housing justice team,

Rob Bonta ([00:49:20](#)):

Right?

Liam Dillon ([00:49:20](#)):

Housing strike force yeah, you know, superheroes. But

Rob Bonta ([00:49:26](#)):

I, I'm

Liam Dillon ([00:49:27](#)):

Curious, you know, what

Rob Bonta ([00:49:28](#)):

You think

Liam Dillon ([00:49:29](#)):

Has been the most significant change as it comes to either politics, culture or legislation as it relates to the AG's office and how it addresses or thinks about housing issues in the state.

Rob Bonta ([00:49:39](#)):

You know, every attorney general and every leader serves in a certain moment and brings their own lived experiences, values, priorities to the job. And I'm honored to occupy a role that has been previously occupied by incredible leaders from Jerry Brown to Vice President Harris to Secretary Bacerra. And each of us have our own priorities. And one of mine was housing. And my priorities are defined not necessarily by what I think about when I'm alone in, in, in a room. And, and I think about all the issues that need to be addressed. I, I try to make the priorities of the people of California my priority. So whatever the top issues are, homelessness and housing affordability will always be a top issue. It's one of the most pressing issues now. And so my question to my team when I was appointed in, in March and and sworn in, in in April of 2021, is what are we doing on housing?

Rob Bonta ([00:50:32](#)):

And how can we do more? How can we be the champion and the advocate for the people of California that we need to be? And we were doing some things on housing, but we needed to do more in, in, in my view. So we created a, a special unit. It was originally called the housing strike force. Now the Housing Justice unit. And putting resources and institutionalizing a, a priority in the principle really shows the value that you give to it. And you know, we have a lot, we were looking at all the levers that we have. We were given new, new powers, new laws came online as we took office SSB nine, SB 10 some, you know, a lot of the laws on ADUs. We started seeing cities across the, the state really do their best and, and be involved in mental gymnastics to avoid their legal duties, to, to not build, you know, really trying hard to not build.

Rob Bonta ([00:51:25](#)):

And, and our belief has always been, you know, follow the law, work in good faith, do your part, we will work with you. We don't wanna sue you. We wanna help you comply. We want to advise counsel. Sometimes cajole and sometimes compel and, but, but we don't seek to sue if we don't have to. But I think one of the, the biggest issues was just saying, we care about housing. We're gonna fight on

housing. Great partner in H C D with the governor's office and great partner in the legislature. And so it was, and, and just enforcing the existing law was very important. So it

Liam Dillon ([00:51:55](#)):

Sounds like you're saying more so than any particular law or policy is almost a culture shift. You wanted to come in and making that a priority was, do you think, was been the most significant in terms of your office?

Rob Bonta ([00:52:06](#)):

For me. And, and I think the biggest changes are, are driven internally by folks with positional power. People in elected office like, like myself, which I currently have the honor, privilege to serve, but also outside forces. I call it the inside, outside game. And to me, the rise of the YIMBYs has been game changing. For, for YIMBYs to step up and be loud and be aggressive and be politically involved and policy involved, that's changed everything. And you know, when I started in elected office, it was all nimby all the time. And I was in, I was in local office. And that to have that counter narrative, that counterforce to be involved, to push back and, and I think to be winning the day now has been very helpful.

Liam Dillon ([00:52:48](#)):

So there are many possible avenues for your office to act in this space. Specific to denials of housing projects required housing element blueprints and cities to put together every years to say, this is where we want to allow for building new housing. You know, how do, how do, I'm, I'm really curious about how you think about and how your office thinks about prioritizing where you want to act when, where you do act.

Rob Bonta ([00:53:14](#)):

One of the most important things is just to act, to, to show that there is accountability enforcement teeth when cities fail to comply. And sometimes we address some of the most egregious violations, like a town self declaring itself. A mountain lion sanctuary.

Liam Dillon ([00:53:34](#)):

Yes. And

Rob Bonta ([00:53:35](#)):

It's not a mountain lion sanctuary.

Liam Dillon ([00:53:36](#)):

This actually happened.

Rob Bonta ([00:53:37](#)):

This happened, yes.

Liam Dillon ([00:53:38](#)):

This

Rob Bonta ([00:53:38](#)):

Happened in the town of Woodside to, to try to avoid you know, at the, the requirements, the mandatory requirements of SB nine, which is,

Liam Dillon ([00:53:45](#)):

Sorry, just that's, so you would allow the duplexes and potentially four plexes, single family

Rob Bonta ([00:53:51](#)):

Plus Yes, yes. Lot splitting on which, which is mandatory. And there are some exemptions, including if you're a mountain lion sanctuary. So they thought that would be a, a good thing to do, even though it wasn't true. And, and, and so getting involved right away forcefully publicly, and having them change course immediately, literally within 24 hours was, was important. We didn't, we didn't pick that fight. We didn't know a town was gonna declare itself a, a mount lion sanctuary. But when it happened, it was important to leap into action immediately. We, we often leave, we team up with H C D in the governor's office. They tend to focus more on housing element enforcement and work. And we tend to enforce the existing laws, SB nine, SB 10 a d U laws. So we can sort of split up the responsibilities that way.

Rob Bonta ([00:54:35](#)):

But we find ourselves teaming up a lot. And it's important to get involved because it sends a message early and we can't enforce, and we hope we don't have to enforce in every city every time. But when we enforce forcefully and immediately, and authoritatively and change the course of what a city's doing, other cities take notice. We, we, we saw after our, our Woodside enforcement on, on SB nine on lot splitting, the lot splitting law. We found that other in, in the minutes from the dais. Other cities like Santa Monica and, and, and Fullerton were saying the, the attorney general's view of SSB nine in his enforcement prevents us from taking this step that we were gonna take to avoid the, the requirements of SB nine. So we need to follow it.

Liam Dillon ([00:55:23](#)):

So you're saying essentially, if you pick a high profile battle and you're definitive enough, then you think it would have a deterrent effect and that, and that's part of how you prioritize what you're doing? Yeah.

Rob Bonta ([00:55:32](#)):

I mean, it has a ripple effect. It has a sense, a message. And so and, and that's important.

Liam Dillon ([00:55:37](#)):

So I want to ask about one specific situation. I'm gonna read it to make sure I get it exactly right. But cities here in the San Diego area have had, or have had to approve these state approved housing blueprints in 2021. So a while ago the city of Coronado submitted a plan to the state in 2021 that only accounted for a third of the 900 units that they were required to plan for. During a meeting in June of that year, Coronado council members said that they were, they were aware the state could crack down, but they weren't really worried about it. And one council member said, and I'll quote, we would probably have a few years before they might get serious about that end quote. So that council member was right. No lawsuit no definitive action. Here's, and my point is, so here's a city, right? That's thumbed its nose at the state two years ago and said, eh, you know, these guys aren't gonna do anything. And they ended up being proven. Right. So what does that situation say about the, the kind of action, or in this case, you know, lack thereof, that, that the steer office and and others at the state are, are taking on these, on these points?

Rob Bonta ([00:56:47](#)):

I'll first say that, that council member, is not right, and they are not gonna be proven. Right. We will

Liam Dillon ([00:56:52](#)):

Be, but it's been two years. They were proven, right. I mean, they said a couple years before they do anything. And here we are.

Rob Bonta ([00:56:58](#)):

Well, let me just finish the thought here. We're on the verge of announcing something. We, we are well aware of Coronado. And, and to your point about priority the most brazen violators are our priority. Huntington Beach is a priority. They've been a brazen violator, a multiple violator over time willfully, knowingly, intentionally violating the laws of the state of California. And so that's a problem for us. And so we get involved. We Coronado has also been, has failed to comply as well. We have been engaged with them. We have been speaking with them. We are in the final stages of a resolution, which will bring them into compliance. And so we have a term sheet, it needs to be voted on. We're hopeful and optimistic that it will get final approval by the, the council. It has not yet. And that can happen as early, I believe, as next week or, or the week after. So we usually don't announce anything before it's final. And there's nothing to announce now because it's not final. But since you asked a question I'll say it's been on our radar. We've been engaged we haven't had to sue. And if this gets approved, we won't have had to sue because we will get the outcome that is required by our engagement and our threats to sue.

Rob Bonta ([00:58:12](#)):

And, and, and subsequent negotiation to get them in compliance. So they will be in compliance in very short order

Rob Bonta ([00:58:18](#)):

If they, if they vote you know, to approve the term sheet.

Liam Dillon ([00:58:22](#)):

So I was gonna say, I think the Mayor Coronado was here earlier, so I don't know. I mean, you could've served him earlier if you <laugh>,

Rob Bonta ([00:58:29](#)):

But no, no need, no need to serve him. We're,

Rob Bonta ([00:58:31](#)):

We're, we're, we're

Rob Bonta ([00:58:32](#)):

Negotiating the final outcome to get them in compliance. Got

Liam Dillon ([00:58:35](#)):

It. <Laugh>, I, one other question on the prioritization. 'cause I think this is really, as I said, since you sort of act in infinite ways, why you decide to act where and when. I think it's really interesting and

important to understand what ultimately happens here. You know, there's been some criticism that you, that your office and also the governor's office has you know, prioritized, sort of redder cities in some of its actions. Huntington Beach being sort of redder in Orange County, elk Grove, which you've been very active on a, on a development there that they've been rejecting in, in Sacramento county reder than, than other communities. Whereas, you know, there are lots of cities in Marin County, for instance, a democratic stronghold that are outta compliance with housing element sort of historically city that's, or communities that have been anti housing. What do you make of the criticism, like look like these dems that control state government are targeting, you know, redder cities and not sort of the communities that that are kind of their bread and butter politically?

Rob Bonta ([00:59:37](#)):

I think it comes with the territory

Rob Bonta ([00:59:38](#)):

Territory to, to get the criticism and, and, and folks will read into it what they want to see. And our job is to go wherever the facts and the law take us. And that means going after the most brazen violators when appropriate. That includes Huntington Beach. Their makeup on their council is their makeup on their council. We don't care what it is. We care what their actions are. And more importantly, their failures to act in compliance with the law. Elk Grove has been out of compliance for longer than they should and, and has had opportunity to, to em embrace corrective action, but has not, they're, they're, they're a blue council and a democratic mayor. One of the first council o other cities that we went after, after was Pasadena, a a Democratic mayor a mayor from labor. And so it doesn't matter what, what your party is what your history is, the only thing we're caring about is your actions or your lack thereof. And people and leaders across the political spectrum and local jurisdictions have shown the capacity to violate state law. And so when they do, whoever they are, regardless of who they are, what party affiliation they have we, we will act as appropriate. I mean, Woodside as well, one of the early high profile that's a Bay area City, yeah. And you know, it, it's, it's, you know, that the Bay Area is blue, so we, we go, we act based on conduct and nothing else.

Liam Dillon ([01:01:10](#)):

So switch gears a little bit. And you brought up this legislation that you were a part of AB 1482, which in addition, as you said to these just cause provisions that, that prevent evictions without lease violation. You also mentioned that there's a rent cap that is for housing that's older than 15 years. Right? Rolling. Then cities around the state are our communities are not landlords in these communities are not allowed to raise the rent higher than 5% plus an an inflation figure that is produced annually. And it's interesting 'cause this law was passed in 2019, took effect in 2020. And every year, every August when the inflation figures change, I call around to try to get someone to tell me what the new actual rent cap is. 5% plus something. It's actually 10% this year in, in San Diego. But it's, it changes differently or it's dependent on, and I'll call the governor's office. I've called your office, I've called legislative leaders, the Senate and, and the assembly, Hey, gimme the actual number, and no one wants to do it because...

Liam Dillon ([01:02:18](#)):

No one is in charge in the legislation of actually setting and being accountable for what that number is. And that always struck me as, you know, well, if no one's taking charge of what the actual number for the allowable rent increases, then who is enforcing, right? Whether tenants are paying in excess or being subject to excessive rents under this law. And this obviously is a law very near and dear to your

heart. What do you think, you know, can and should be done to ensure that these, as you said, the most aggressive pro-tenant or rent cap in the country, actually gets, gets enforced?

Rob Bonta ([01:02:58](#)):

I mean, you make a great point. I, I think clarity and certainty in the front end is, is, is the best approach. And having a legal opinion or some sort of authoritative declare declaration of what the max increases for the eligible tenants could make it clear on the front end. It could, it could avoid unintended violation of the law. It could make tenants more aware of their rights and, and so that they can evaluate their own rent increases to see if they violate or not. So you make a good point. I, I think it'd be better and more helpful to have it clear on the front end. Having said that, we've enforced AB 1482 on the anti rent gouging component. We were involved in a South Bay landlords violation of the law, and, you know, we worked with them

Liam Dillon ([01:03:50](#)):

South bay and LA?

Rob Bonta ([01:03:51](#)):

Sorry, south Bay in, in the, in the San Francisco Bay area. Okay. Yeah. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> San Jose area. Yeah. And they were way above the, the, the the limits on the, on the increase. So, but I, but I think there should be clarity and certainty, so you make a good point. There should be a, a clear and obvious and universal answer to your question.

Liam Dillon ([01:04:12](#)):

So if I if I live in San Diego and my landlord tries to increase my rent 10%, or I'm sorry, 12% right now should I have, should they call you?

Rob Bonta ([01:04:22](#)):

Yeah

Liam Dillon ([01:04:22](#)):

Personally on your cell, or

Rob Bonta ([01:04:24](#)):

Not?

Liam Dillon ([01:04:24](#)):

Not

Rob Bonta ([01:04:24](#)):

Not me necessarily

Liam Dillon ([01:04:25](#)):

Okay uhhuh,

Rob Bonta ([01:04:27](#)):

We have a housing

Rob Bonta ([01:04:27](#)):

Portal for our housing justice team.

Rob Bonta ([01:04:29](#)):

You can send us a note. And we've gotten lots of incoming violations of tenant protections, violations of AB 1482 violations of, of housing production, of housing element law. So our housing portal is the best way to get a, to get a response.

Liam Dillon ([01:04:44](#)):

I wanted to ask a question about the increasing corporatization of rental housing, single family homes predominantly and otherwise. You know, last year ProPublica published a really great investigation about concerns that that RealPage software that is used by some of the nation's biggest landlords to set rent prices. And they alleged were colluding to make those rent prices higher because they were able to capture or understand so much of what the market share was. The federal D O J has been looking into this but I'm curious whether this particular issue or issues like this are also on your radar at the ad's office and, and, and how you think about those.

Rob Bonta ([01:05:22](#)):

They are on our radar, and we don't comment on, on current or pending specific investigations, but we we're well aware of new technological approaches and uses and no, no matter how you do it, whether you're a, a, you know, an individual landlord or you're a, a, a, a mega landlord with, with massive holdings and you're using technology, we have laws that prevent discrimination and that protect tenants. And so we will, and, and, and in this, in my role, I've seen that the, the challenges often change as technology changes and new approaches emerge. So discrimination and violation of the law can look like many different things. So we need to always be up to date and on, on point with the most recent actions. So that is on our radar. We're thankful that the federal D O J is involved as well, I think in other state ags are as well. And, and so are we

Liam Dillon ([01:06:18](#)):

I want to give, there's a lot of ballot measures statewide, or as it relates to housing potentially coming up next year. I wanted to do a little bit of a lightning round to get your picks. First there is the repeal, potential repeal of Article 34, which we discussed earlier which would currently is a, is a hurdle to getting public housing approved. There's a potential ballot measure that would repeal Article 34 from the Constitution. How are you gonna vote on that <laugh>?

Rob Bonta ([01:06:50](#)):

Let me first say, I, I write the title and summary. So since I do that, I'm, I'm more sensitive around the, the public positions that I take, the endorsements that I, I provide on the ballot measures that I write. It's very important that people trust me in my office if to write fair transparent, easy to understand titles and summaries. But I think there's been no secret about who I am, what I stand for in terms of addressing our, our housing needs. So I'm gonna vote for anything that increases housing in a, in a thoughtful and fair way, that helps us address our crisis in anything that protects tenants in a reasonable

way. And that's not unfair to landlords. And that addresses our crisis. That's, that's been the legislation that I've authored and the actions that I've taken as ag.

Liam Dillon ([01:07:40](#)):

So I'll, I'll pun on the rest of the ballot measures, and just instead, I'll ask the one more question that I'm allowed to ask. So and I, every panel that I do now with a, a lawmaker somewhat position of power, I like to end with this question 'cause I think it's really important. So since the big wave of housing laws began being passed in 2017 at the legislature housing prices are up, rents are up, homelessness is up housing production, relatively stagnant. What does this say about the effectiveness of the state's approach in addressing housing affordability when by all metrics, all reasonable metrics, we're in a worse position now than we were six years ago, when a lot of these laws were, were, were being passed.

Rob Bonta ([01:08:32](#)):

I, I don't know if that's the appropriate conclusion. I, I understand that the, the point it could be that we've slowed down the, the, the rate increases on, on rents and housing, and instead of a median price of 800,000 in the state, it could be a million, but for the action of leaders and legislators and attorneys general and, and other, you know, pro housing leaders across the state. So it's hard to know, but the conclusion is right, that there is much more to be done and we haven't done enough, and we need to be more urgent and act faster and build faster. I mean, the, the, the numbers don't lie. We need 2.5 million units online by 2030 and, and on our current pace, a hundred to 125,000 units a year, we're not gonna get there. That the price of an average a single family home in, in San Diego is close to a million.

Rob Bonta ([01:09:22](#)):

And, and, and there's other places where there's, there's smaller markets which are more than the 800,000 statewide. People like me wonder where their children are gonna live if they can buy a home. I don't think my kids can right now. And that is not something reserved to just me. That is, I think, a universal belief and, and worry. So we need to do more. We need to, I think a lot of what the state has been doing is, is on the right track. You know, the Senator Wieners of the world, the assembly, WIC member Wix is of the world that are pushing, that are streamlining, that are expediting housing producing providing BuyRight housing making sure that c a doesn't unnecessarily delay and get in the way as we uplift the, the, and support our environmental protections. We still build housing.

Rob Bonta ([01:10:06](#)):

They're not mutually exclusive. We can do both. So we need to do more of some of the things that are working, and then we need to assess what, what's not working. You know, the cost of a housing unit is too much. It might be easier to build less expensive units faster. We haven't had labor behind the effort to, to get those 2.5 million units. I think if we can, it, it, it's you know, you blow open the doors and, and the for possibility if, if we get everyone aligned and on the right side or aligned politically. So it, it, it's a sobering set of facts that reminds us that there's much more to do. But I don't think you should necessarily conclude and draw from it that no progress has been made and that everything that's been done has been for naught. I, I, I, I think it would be gonna be in a much worse position. And there could be some data that shows we've actually moved, the needles slowed down, that the price increases and moving towards, we need to be just not there yet.

Liam Dillon ([01:11:04](#)):

Alright. Please join me in thanking Attorney General <inaudible>.

Scott Lewis ([01:11:12](#)):

Now, hold on. He's still got a couple things to answer. Oh, okay. Okay. So we did have an audience member that won the opportunity to to ask you a question, but I have one, and then I can ask a question. So the the mayor of San Diego, the city of San Diego, recently decided to join an amicus brief about a Supreme Court case that's approaching about whether cities are allowed to perform the kind of sweeps or enforcement anti camping enforcement. We passed a new camping ban here. I think it's a little odd for them to ask that it be legal or ruled legal, something they already decided to do. But they also the mayor of San Francisco and the governor came out very harshly against the judge that he blames for them not being able to to sweep and, and enforce anti camping bans to the extent that they would like to. I'm curious, do you believe that those enforcement measures that San Francisco and San Diego and other places would like to do are illegal? Or do you think they are illegal?

Rob Bonta ([01:12:26](#)):

So you, you're talking about a, a, a set of cases that are moving towards the US Supreme Court and they're gonna get a decision. Grant's Pass in Boise are the two cases. Yeah. And they basically have held that it violates the eighth Amendment for cruel and, and unusual punishment to, to punish someone who is his homeless without if, if you criminalize them, without providing them with somewhere where they can be and stay and, and sleep. And so I think that in, in San Diego and San Francisco and anywhere else that has a policy, if they are providing a a unit and, and appropriate services to someone on the, the street who is involuntarily homeless and then they are meeting their obligation, you, if they need to provide an opportunity for them to get off the street in a way that addresses their needs, if they're saying, you can't, you, you, you can't stay here. We're not gonna help you just go somewhere else. They're violating the law. But if they are providing them a compassionate place with services and and programming for them, then that is compliant with the law. And if folks want to be voluntarily homeless and say no to what they're being offered, then they can enforce. And I think that, I think that's an important balance.

Rob Bonta ([01:13:44](#)):

And so I'll just say, you know, I, I understand the governor's frustration. I understand that Mayor Breed and Mayor Gloria's f frustration and concern there was a, a magistrate judge that made a, a decision in, in San Francisco that was very difficult for San Francisco to work with. And so they're expressing themselves, but I don't want us to move the pendulum too far the other way. We, we, we cannot make being homeless criminal and, and be punitive and be inhumane about it. We must always maintain our humanity and compassion and provide opportunities for shelter for those on the street. And then if after that folks are voluntarily electing not to accept, then force enforcement can be part of the, the, the actions of the cities after that.

Liam Dillon ([01:14:31](#)):

Just a very quick follow, follow up on this point. Do, do you think that, that the current kind of governing is the Martin versus Boise decision? Do you think that should be overturned or, or do you think that that is the right, the right policy?

Rob Bonta ([01:14:41](#)):

I'll, I'll be honest, when, when Martin came down, I was a little surprised that the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment was being used in this context and in this way. I, I think that a ruling, I, I think, I think Martin v Boise needs clarification. I think some people think that it means that until you have a plan for every single homeless person in a jurisdiction San Francisco, let's say, you can't, move one of them off the street. I think that's wrong. I think you can move any single individual off the street and into housing, and that complies with the Martin v Boise, requirement. And you don't have to have a plan for every, it shouldn't be that because you don't have a plan for everybody. You can't help anybody. You should be able to help individuals and move neighborhood by neighborhood as long as you're fulfilling your duty to provide them, with a compassionate, shelter opportunity.

Scott Lewis ([01:15:39](#)):

Okay. Thank you. Colleen, Colleen here won the opportunity answering a, a little trivia for me to ask you a question. So Colleen,

Attendee Colleen Cusack ([01:15:49](#)):

Thank you. This podcast is called AG on the Spot. We have a for the last 12 years for, we have had one to two jail deaths per month. And we had a state audit that blamed those deaths on bad management and the failure to do any preventive measures. There's been repeated requests of your office to take receivership, and I wanna know how you're going to intervene to stop these deaths because nothing is?

Rob Bonta ([01:16:23](#)):

So, sorry, I missed the first part of your question. You're talking about San Diego County Jail?

Attendee Colleen Cusack ([01:16:26](#)):

Yeah,

Rob Bonta ([01:16:27](#)):

Yeah. We're well aware of the data. We have looked across the state at the sheriff's departments that have the highest in custody death rates, and San Diego's one of 'em. And so a new sheriff was elected, and the first meeting that I had with her was to talk about this welcome her to the role offer support as well, but to talk about the disturbing number of in-custody deaths. And she shared some views with me. She also talked about some action that she planned to take, to address some of the concerns that she had. And so I thought appropriate and fair to allow the new sheriff to take a crack at addressing the problem that she's inherited as the new sheriff. And so we are due to have a follow up meeting in short order but we're aware and we're working on it a lawsuit is always possible. We launch pattern and practice investigations when civil rights are violated. We've done that in Riverside County with the Riverside Sheriff's County Sheriff's Department, for example, and we can do it here as well. So that always remains an option, and it might be the option that we elect at some point, but at this point we're hoping that collaborative partnership to address a challenge that we are very disturbed by and aware of can get results.

Scott Lewis ([01:17:50](#)):

I did get a note that there was a follow up on the previous question about that. When you mentioned suitable shelter needed to be available, do you have a definition in mind of what suitable is?

Rob Bonta ([01:18:04](#)):

Yeah That's a, that's a tough question, but, but I, it needs to meet the basic needs of, of the individual who is unsheltered involuntarily. And so, what do I mean by that? If it's someone who needs just a shelter and nothing else, then it's that. If it's someone who needs wraparound services, that could include mental health treatment or drug rehabilitation treatment, then that if it's someone who has a pet and that's their family member, that's a tougher one. But it might mean that if it's someone who has children it might mean a, a safe place for them and their children. So you need to address and confront the unique circumstances of the individual and do your best. I mean, we could go down this rabbit hole where we're talking about 10,000 different requirements, and then it becomes impractical. We need to be practical, we need to be common sense. At some point, the offer will have to be enough, even though it's not everything under the sky that's being asked for.

Scott Lewis ([01:19:05](#)):

Well, I I just wanna express that my gratitude for you making the trip and coming down and speaking. It's, you know, obviously we remain objective, but I I'm also grateful you helped make this a more engaging and interesting discussion. So thanks for coming down. And everybody, Liam, it's great to have him back right there. I want to give a shout out to a couple people. Julianne, Markow did such a good job. She, she shouldered a lot of burden to make this possible today. And Jennifer Vu. Jennifer here Jennifer did a wonderful job as well. Let's here for Jennifer. And Nate. Nate, John. He's been in charge of the audio visual and just the website and so many other things. He just asked everybody if they had any Tylenol available.

Scott Lewis ([01:20:05](#)):

So, hi, let's give our heart to Nate. He worked so hard here to all the sponsors. We've read your names a thousand times. I really appreciate it. It, it would've blown my mind 13 years ago when we first started this, to have a list of sponsors that long and hopefully it's double next year and, and beyond. All of your memberships matter. All of our journalists work on you know, we gotta make sure they can afford to live in San Diego. We work really hard to do that. All of every dollar matters, and thank you so much to our individual donors and members. And we have some drinks and food up here. One we, it's a little cut short, but we have about an hour. So come out there and say hi. And thank you to the U s D and University of San Diego School for arts and Sciences and College for our Arts and Sciences. And thank you to everybody who made this possible. And we'll see you up there. Thank you.

Speaker 11 ([01:21:08](#)):

Was thank you. Good job. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, I, I, I here, yeah. Yeah. So we ready for that one? I saw, I saw, I think you said as you announced it, you'd be here, we'd be having this conversation. Like anyone have any questions? Like, what's going on with Coronado? Like, I'm like, what we, what can we say here, guys? I mean, usually we keep a quiet until the end, but I It's a public. Yeah. Was it, was it Corona?