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If you want to get a good sense of the travails of the modern press, look no further than Politico's recent writeup of SB 79, Senator Scott Wiener's new bill to mandate upzoning around transit stops.

Importantly, this isn't because it's a bad article but precisely because it's a *good* article (and not just because Julia and I were quoted in it, although that of course helps).

At 100,000 feet, Wiener's bill is straightforward: it pre-empts local zoning within a half-mile transit stops – defined basically a rail stops, or designated busways with 15-minute intervals at rush hour – and requires permits by-right for multifamily units. It does this not only by allowing density, but also by loosening height restrictions, which gets progressively tighter up to a half-mile from the transit stop.

This resembles, as Kahn notes, "California's painstaking incremental housing wars." California, more than just about any other state, has really pushed the envelope on zoning reform, and so SB 79 is part of a piece. Little wonder, then, that local officials like Imelda Padilla, in an online debate with Wiener about the legislation, literally bragged about reducing the amount of affordable housing in a proposed development (it's about at 18:30 of this video – watch the host's eyes pop out of their sockets).

Until a few days ago, many left-wing groups opposed the legislation, saying that it lacks sufficient anti-displacement provisions and was not clear about affordability requirements: it has now been amended, and they are on board. (The bill has a relatively low affordability requirement, for fear of projects not penciling out, but it clearly states that local governments can add tougher requirements: this means that the bill will generate more affordable units statewide).

All right. Then what's the problem? This guy:



This guy, I learned a few days ago, is a former reality show star named Spencer Pratt, who lives in Pacific Palisades, and is now crusading against SB 79 (even though author Debra Kahn accurately notes that it would not apply to the Palisades, which lacks the sort of public transit that triggers the bill's provisions). And so apparently to get her editors interested in running the article, the story is framed as the new-found power of washed-up reality stars. Julia, who has forgotten more about television than I am ever going to know, noted well that "We widely, at th[e] time [of his reality show], regarded Spencer Pratt as the garbage boyfriend of the world," Julia said. "Little did I know that he would also be the garbage boyfriend of land use." I will now make sure to ridicule her for her bad entertainment taste.

There is only one problem. This story isn't about Pratt at all. It is a bog-standard story of trench warfare, in which local governments, dominated by NIMBY voters, resist upzoning. Yes, yes: the Los Angeles City Council passed a resolution 8-5 opposing the bill after Pratt started posting YouTube videos opposing it. But 1) that

is actually pretty good for pro-housing forces; and 2) city councilmembers *always* oppose housing legislation. Since Pratt started mouthing off about the bill, it has attracted even *more* support.

The impetus for the resolution isn't Pratt, but rather City Councilmembers Traci Park, who has opposes all housing everywhere, and John Lee, who represents the northwest San Fernando Valley, the only Republican district in the city.

This is standard Los Angeles politics, as I mentioned in my post a few weeks ago about Mayor NIMBY Karen Bass. And even more than normal: it is just the thing for city councilmembers to oppose this legislation, knowing that what they say will not really affect the bill's chance of passage. It's a freebee for them.

But Politico decided to make this story about reality television rather than, say, the price of housing, because apparently that is how you get clicks nowadays. That's silly, but it also runs the risk of elevating a has-been like Pratt (or is that a never-was?) to prominence he doesn't deserve (as Kahn recognizes, calling Pratt, "something of a heel." Then why give him credit for something he manifestly did not do?).

In any event, I will risk egg on my face over the next few days because I don't see why they would move this bill forward now. It passed the Assembly today, but it needs to go back to the Senate, and Gavin Newsom, as we have long known, only cares about being President (his shockingly tone-deaf response to Charlie Kirk's assassination should be seen in that light). If Proposition 50, the Election Rigging Response Act, wins at the ballot box in November, it catapults him as front-runner to be the Democratic nominee in 2028 (assuming that we still have elections). There is literally no reason to alienate potential constituencies by signing this bill. But if the Legislature passes it, he will have to act. If the Legislature sits on it, he can simply wave away questions as hypotheticals and then move next year. Now that the Building Trades and the Carpenters' Union have signed on, perhaps that is reason enough for Newsom to green-light it, but he can have his cake and eat it, too, if he waits.

So I think we will be back here in January. And hopefully, we won't have to deal with the likes of Pratt.

I get it: it's hard to get readers interested in state legislation. Fine: then just run pictures of scantily clad models next to every story. At least then, Politico can be

relatively honest about what it’s doing. Every now and then, people actually *did* read the Playboy interviews, after all.