

Drew Owen Parkin
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November 15, 1994

Dear Counselors Russell, Sullivan, and Walsh,

I understand that the City Council is in the process of creating a home rule petition concerning rent control and wish to offer my nickel's worth. I am a 13 year resident of Cambridge who is neither a tenant or a landlord, nor have any direct, personal stake in the outcome. Never-the-less, like all residents of this City I am both affected and concerned regarding the outcome.

Over the past few years I have followed the rent control issue closely as I believe that it is an issue of profound social significance. After careful and hopefully impartial evaluation, I came to the personal conclusion that rent control is extremely bad public policy. I will spare you an explanation of my reasoning. However, I would like to briefly address the home rule petition.

I believe that a home rule petition is a poor idea. The voters demanded an end to rent control, not a re-hash and re-packaging. Further, an end to rent control is clearly in the best interest of the city. As long as we hang on to it - regardless of its form - we will postpone grappling with the long-term housing issue - providing affordable housing to those in need without trampling on the rights of property owners. Perpetuation of any form of rent control will also focus attention away from the other pressing issues that face the City but that have been ignored due to the 20 year rent control dog fight. For these reasons I plan to write Governor Weld to ask that he withstand the pressure to accept a home rule petition.

However, as a realist, I recognize that some form of home rule petition is a possibility and therefore wish to have my opinions considered regarding its content. Points that I have not heard discussed, but that I believe are extremely important, are as follows:

- 1. Means Testing.** By now, everyone except the die-hard me-first crowd agrees that a means test is the only fair way to approach this issue. (If the CCA would have recognized this there would have been no Question 9.) Unfortunately, the word "needy" has not been adequately defined. I am most concerned about what I will term the "needy by choice." As you know, in Cambridge we have many people who have been attracted by rent control and, by virtue of this, have been able to live on the cheap while pursuing endless graduate studies or other hedonistic endeavors. The perfect example is one of the men that the Chronicle paraded out to show the evils of Question 9. By choice this man plays chess in Harvard Square for a dollar a game and would, it was inferred, be out on the streets if Question 9 passed. Does this able-bodied, able-minded man deserve a rent subsidy? I think not. I have to work to support my family and pay my rent. So should he. So should the yoga instructor, the flea market

artist, and all of the other needy by choice residents that have blanketed the editorial pages with pleas to keep rent control. I suggest a very strict interpretation of "needy," which focuses exclusively on the elderly, the disabled, and the otherwise disadvantaged.

2. **Owner Occupancy.** Exemptions for smaller units - be it 3, 4, 5, or 6 - should not be limited to units that are "owner-occupied." While there are numerous horror stories regarding this, I will cite just one. I know a family with young children that recently left Cambridge because of a job transfer. They were not able to sell their two-family for a decent amount and were therefore forced to rent it under rent control. Having bought at the peak of the market they were left eating a net loss of \$2,000 and heading towards bankruptcy while their tenants shop at Bread-and-Circus and drive new cars. These people and others like them should have the right to leave their homes without having to be subjected to some arbitrary owner occupancy regulation.

3. **Sunset Clause.** Talk of sunset provisions is a ruse concocted by rent control advocates to lull the rest of us to sleep. Their real agenda is to keep their finger in the dike until the political climate changes in their favor. Sunset clauses must be iron-clad, with no opportunity to back-pedal. They must also be of short duration. In no case should they go beyond Governor Weld's next term in office. If he is to sign on to some agreement he should have the right to see that it is carried out.

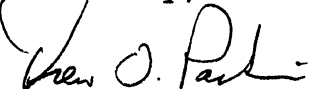
4. **Rent Control Investigations and Fines.** Any home rule petition should rightfully include guarantees that ongoing and planned violation investigations will be terminated. Similarly, as a demonstration of City Council good faith, the City should be required to reimburse all property owners that have been subjected to rent control board mandated fees, fines, or punitive payments to tenants. This should occur prior to the granting of a home rule petition.

5. **Rent Control Board.** As a condition of acceptance of the home rule petition, the rent control board should be dismantled and the staff either dismissed or reassigned. (Scraping and painting neglected rent controlled buildings would be a perfect assignment for displaced rent control board administrators and lawyers!)

Thank you for considering my opinion on this subject. I continue to believe that the wise and honorable course is to scrap rent control and provide direct assistance using the rent control board budget and other means. Short of this, I hope that you will attempt to incorporate the provisions that I have identified in this letter into the impending home rule petition.

Thank you for your efforts regarding this issue.

Sincerely,



Drew O. Parkin

Comm. # 8

S-514

Comm. from Drew Owen Parkin, 15 Thingvalla
Avenue, transmitting his views on rent
control.

In City Council,

November 16, 1994

11/16/94 Placed in file