



The housing affordability crisis is generational warfare

An excerpt from an op-ed by Henry Grabar in Slate, May 30, 2019.

“How many people must live in the street before we can build new homes?”

“ ‘More’ was the answer earlier this month from the California State Senate, where SB 50 was stalled by the former mayor of a town that has not [built an apartment in a decade](#), and where the median home sells for \$1.6 million.

[“Apartment bans](#) are a case of rich vs. poor, longtime resident vs. newcomer, and often, white vs. black, but they are also generational warfare in which older homeowners are telling younger renters that there’s no more room: ‘I’ve got mine.’”

“For most of the 20th century, America has been [run by elder statesmen](#), with the average representative now 20 years older than the median resident, [and] things are not getting better with each passing generation. Even on the left, our elected officials don’t quite get it, [with] continued inaction in Washington, in statehouses, and at the polls on issues like housing affordability, college costs, and climate change. Sometimes they are more explicit, as Joe Biden was when he said he has ‘no empathy’ for millennials talking about how tough things are. Biden’s presidential campaign has the support of almost half of [Democrats over 45](#), four times the support of his closest opponent.

“[But] since the wunderkind from Delaware became the sixth-youngest senator in U.S. history in 1973, the cost of getting a college education more than doubled between 1985 and 2015. Student loan debt is approaching [\\$1.5 trillion](#)—up from [\\$90 billion in 1999](#), a 1,500 percent increase.

“The ratio of median home price to median income is 4.2, a full point higher than it was in 1988. Not coincidentally, the share of home equity owned by Americans over 60 has [risen](#) 17 percentage points between 2006 and 2018. That’s in part because we are building fewer homes per capita than at any time since World War II, a situation that seems unlikely to change anytime soon.

“Of course, it’s unfair to judge all Americans over 55 by the incompetence of our wizened legislatures: Many older Americans do get it.

“Inaction on housing and climate harms older people too. The affordability crisis is in some ways hardest on the elderly, and the lack of diverse housing options makes it impossible for even well-off seniors to downsize in their own neighborhoods. Older Americans are also more vulnerable to the extreme weather associated with climate change. And the inability of younger Americans to secure long-term financial stability is bad news for everyone.

“To solve this problem, younger people need to vote like they did in 2018. It doesn’t feel like an accident that the youngest woman ever elected to Congress has done more to advance



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climate change discourse in Washington in six months than Democrats have done in a decade.”

FYI, I just turned 86, but this op-ed spoke to me.

[You can read the full article here.](#)