

A less-perfect union?

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I have been in the housing industry for nearly 30 years and have seen codes increase and increase and increase ("Is any home good enough for the homeless?" March 28).

While many of these changes have promoted safer structures, it has come with a cost. I have seen the costs of keeping up with those codes increase and increase and increase.

Maybe this is one of those "laws of unintended consequences" things, but government regulation across the land, while maybe trying to make us a "more perfect union," is driving industries into gridlock and pricing people out of markets and, in this case, potentially leaving them homeless.

At what point is enough, enough? If the public indeed insists on making life safer and safer through codes/laws/regulation, then a way needs to be provided to help people or organizations that are trying to help the homeless comply with these ever-increasing laws.

Dave Holtz, Hastings

A necessary conversation

Bob Shaw's March 28 story ("Is any home good enough for the homeless?") brings to light a critical challenge for Minnesota communities.

Unfortunately, the story also wrongly quotes me as saying that housing developed by Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, one of the state's leading developers of decent homes for lower-income

families, is a "bad deal." In fact, I would have said just the opposite.

I have not visited the homes owned by Dave Busch, profiled in the story, and so did not and cannot say whether the tradeoff he proposes — lower quality homes for getting people out of shelters and from under bridges — is one I would recommend for St. Paul.

What I can say is that this difficult, prolonged economic downturn is causing hundreds of additional families to be homeless in Minnesota. At the same time, our Legislature is being forced to reduce the state's financial commitment to housing assistance. Future budgets appear even tighter, while unemployment rates are expected to remain high.

This dilemma should not be dodged by community leaders. That's why I suggested an open forum in this time of crisis to discuss whether any building standards should be temporarily modified to reduce homelessness. And, if not, we need to consider other alternatives to addressing this challenge.

The organization I work for, Minnesota Housing Partnership, recommends that we make the commitments to ensure that high quality, affordable housing is available throughout the state.

Habitat for Humanity and numerous other private and public agencies are building durable, environmentally sustainable homes that will serve generations of people in need in a manner that also enhances the livability and beauty of surrounding neighborhoods. But this critical investment in our communities is not cheap, and public and philanthropic revenues are scarce.

Where do we go as a community? We need to face

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the question your story prompts: Do we enable people to occupy lower quality homes but get off the streets, or make the investment to create the homes and communities we all can be proud of?

Chip Halbach

The writer is executive director of

the Minnesota Housing Partnership.

Stand by your vote

For all those Democratic politicians on the liberal left who voted for Obamacare and perceive the public backlash to be so-called threats, suck it up and stand by your arrogant vote ("Threats against lawmakers spread after health vote," March 26). We will not forget, and we will see you in November.

Kay Foht, Vadnais Heights

Government option

I fail to understand why some of us are opposed to a government option in health reform. They would prefer to leave our health care in the hands of business, the market or the free enterprise system. Aren't those exactly the people who, through their breathtaking greed, represented by bonuses in the millions on top of millions of dollars, brought about the current recession?

Aren't they the ones who taxpayers bailed out by the billions, if not trillions of dollars?

Bruce Nelson, Woodbury