

“You Can’t Have Your Government and Beat It Too”

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By Kelly Bennett

I heard from a few folks on my story about local homebuilder Barratt American today. One of those was Murtaza Baxamusa, director of research for the left-leaning Center on Policy Initiatives, who gave me permission to share his thoughts.

It is interesting that the sworn enemies of government intervention are asking for government intervention, when it suits them. The building industry has been virulently anathematic to anything that even remotely smells of fees or regulation. They beat any public effort to create good jobs, affordable housing or address community impacts of new development. Now that the building industry is in a mess for no fault of either fees or regulations, they have found a new scapegoat -- banks. These financial institutions are being demonized for doing what builders used to do in good times -- minding their bottom-lines. In the early part of the decade, the builders were so drunk in demand, that they had little concern for socio-economic impacts of their binge profiteering. Now that the free market has led to a free fall, jobless builders have a hangover. They want to use taxpayer money do what they faulted everyone else of doing - government intervention in everybody’s business.

You can’t have your government and beat it too.

But when I interviewed Gary London, local real estate analyst, for the story, he thought it was a shame that Barratt’s issues have somewhat taken Pattinson’s focus off of lambasting government fees on housing.

“This is a transformational moment in both government and policymaking and in the economy, such that some of the issues that [Pattinson’s] been more strident about [are those in which] his voice needs to be heard now more than ever,” London said. “We need to hear his message, to transform the way we entitle and permit new development.”

This position is quite common among the homebuilding community. There is a contingent that believes it won’t be long before San Diego has a shortage of housing and they want government to work now to make it easier to get plans approved.