



Good News on the Homeless

David Frum --- July 30, 2008

The homeless population continues to decline, by an estimated [12% per year between 2005 and 2007](#), according to a new report released Tuesday.

As conservatives have long argued, the "homeless" are not ordinary working people who have been priced out of their homes by evil real-estate developers - and the solution to the problem is not more subsidized housing.

The "homeless" are a population with severe to extreme mental health problems, substance-abuse problems, or other unusual challenges. They need housing plus some other kind of support - and in recent years, under new Bush administration policies that emphasize treatment as well as housing, those needs have been more and more successfully met.

Result: not only has homelessness declined, but it has declined most steeply among the hardest cases.

Ending homelessness has been from the start a high priority of the Bush administration - and a cherished cause of one of the most important but least acclaimed of the administration's domestic policy appointees, Phil Mangano, who has served for more than 6 years as executive director of the United States Interagency Council on the Homeless. Here is a [profile](#) a few years back from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Homelessness is one of the few corners of public policy in which traditional liberal ideas have gone largely unchallenged. But Mangano believes that many professional activists, though well intentioned, have given up on ending homelessness. They have accepted the problem as intractable and fallen back on social work and handouts as a way to make broken lives more bearable. In doing so, he says, they have allowed "a certain amount of institutionalism" to take root. The Bush Administration proposes to solve the problem by beginning with the hardest cases: the 10 percent who are severe addicts or mentally ill, and consume half of all resources devoted to homeless shelters. Mangano believes that by moving these chronic cases into "supportive housing"—a private room or apartment where they would receive support services and psychotropic medications—the government could actually save money, and free up tens of thousands of shelter beds. The Bush Administration, spotting an opportunity to increase the return on its investment, is seeking to end chronic homelessness within ten years.

We cannot yet say that Mangano has succeeded. But we can say that as with conservative ideas on crime in the 1990s, the Mangano approach to homelessness has transformed a situation once seen as hopeless by discarding orthodoxies once seen as unquestionable. He and the administration he serves deserve immense credit - I'll be very curious tomorrow morning to see where and how this story gets placed.