

# Short-Term ‘Band-Aids’ Won’t End Homelessness, But Our Plan Will

By George Mullen & Brian Caster



Source: Jeff Lewis/AP Images

For the umpteenth time, San Diego’s leaders are implementing temporary, band-aid solutions to our homeless crisis. In the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, leadership relocated 1,300 homeless persons into our suddenly empty downtown convention center.

And now there is talk of moving them (along with homeless veterans) to our presently lifeless county fairgrounds in Del Mar. Both are untenable solutions — because both locations are large scale business operations. When business returns, and it will, the homeless will yet again be swept elsewhere by our politicians.

Isn’t it time to pursue a permanent large-scale site within San Diego County dedicated to helping our homeless brothers and sisters? A location where we can end this cynical game of musical chairs with our most vulnerable citizens? In the effort to accomplish this, we are proposing a bold new strategy called “[Federal Leadership, Local Control.](#)”

San Diego is the perfect location to establish the proof of concept. The proposed site for this novel approach is on federal land in either the Otay Mesa / Brown Field area, or in the empty sectors east of Interstate 15 on Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.



Proposed federal land site for Sunbreak Ranch — Miramar Way exit on Interstate 15.

The reality is that homelessness has always existed, and always will. But the current homeless crisis on our streets — a humanitarian, public health and environmental disaster — has not always existed. And it is resolvable with the right leadership and strategy. Unfortunately, it is painfully clear that our state, county, and city leaders are unwilling or unable to solve the problem. If they could, they surely would have done so by now. Thus, we have no choice but to look for leadership elsewhere.

The President is the sole public officeholder with the political muscle necessary to tackle this crisis head on. Thus far, no one in that position has had the guts to try. But the candidate who wins on Nov. 3 will have a significant opportunity to solve one of America's most vexing problems. Doing so will salvage thousands of lives, end immeasurable suffering on our streets, and save taxpayers a fortune.

Here in five steps is the plan that can make it happen:

1. The President declares a National Homeless Emergency across the homeless-hotbed states of California, Oregon, and Washington.
2. The President and federal government designate 12 separate sites of 200-plus acre plots of federal land on the outskirts of every homeless-epicenter city from San Diego to Seattle to be each region's [Sunbreak Ranch](#). These will be location-solution centers designed to welcome all homeless persons, who can come and go as they please. Individuals can reside in a community

tent or camp on their own in a series of designated (and protected) areas for families, single mothers, elderly, veterans, those with dogs, and so on.

There will be port-o-potties and port-o-showers aplenty, as well as mess halls, medical tents, storage facilities, and onsite service providers. These will include dedicated teams of mental health professionals, drug rehabilitation specialists, and vocational trainers. There will be a free daily shuttle-bus service going to and from the nearest metropolitan downtown. Each Sunbreak will have private security as well as a permanent 24/7 police outpost in order to provide safety and security to all residents. Fox News has [reported on this concept](#).

Importantly, the point is not to park homeless people out of sight. Rather, the Sunbreak goal is to be the location-solution center focused on diagnosing each person's unique situation, and then assisting every able person back to work and independent living. And for those unable, the goal is to get them the services that will best help them.

Some will argue that state and local jurisdictions should just do this on their own if they want. The reality is that it would be near-impossible for them to accomplish. Local jurisdictions attempting to designate a 200-acre site for a [Sunbreak Ranch](#) will be beset by political infighting, approval processes, permitting, NIMBY opposition, environmental protests, and endless red tape.

In other words, it will never happen, and the homeless *status quo* will prevail. This is why the federal option is our "silver bullet." The federal government can indeed designate 12 Sunbreak sites of 200-acres each on federal land without any of the aforementioned red tape or headaches. (The Navy's new Naval Amphibious Training Base just built on the south side of Coronado on federal land is a perfect example — erected quickly without any input or red tape from the adjacent local jurisdictions.)

The first 12 Sunbreaks are targeted for San Diego, Orange County, Riverside/San Bernardino, Los Angeles south, Los Angeles north, Santa Barbara, San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento/Stockton, Portland, and Seattle. More will likely follow.

3. Once the exact Sunbreak locations are identified, the federal government will send FEMA and the military to construct graveled roads and tent cities using surplus military equipment from Iraq and Afghanistan deployments. With our military's unique expertise, these tent cities will rise within weeks and be able to house tens of thousands. Congress will likely have to approve funding, but perhaps there is executive leeway for such a humanitarian emergency. Either way, funding should be minimal for erecting tent cities with surplus military equipment.

4. Each Sunbreak will be handed over to a local consortium (with a dynamic proven leader) that includes representatives from the county, local cities, police, fire, homeless service providers, charities, churches, service clubs, et al. Homelessness at its core is a local issue. Thus, each Sunbreak will need to be managed and operated by locals who best understand that community's unique situation. The Sunbreak *modus operandi* is designed to be "local control" without federal red tape. That being said, there will be a federal mandate for 24/7 local police outposts on every [Sunbreak Ranch](#) to maintain peace, law and order, as well as environmental protection.

Every major city has dozens of organizations that are dedicated to providing services to help the homeless. As such, all qualified homeless service providers will be given rent-free space at [Sunbreak Ranch](#) in order to help them facilitate their outreach and services. The size of the area given will depend on each provider's capacity to serve.

5. In exchange for providing the Sunbreaks, the President and federal government will require the three West Coast states to return to rule of law. With a safe Sunbreak housing option now available to all homeless persons in need, public loitering, camping, littering, defecating, urinating, illicit drug use and petty theft on the streets, canyons and river basins will no longer be permitted. If a jurisdiction refuses to return to rule of law, the President will need to spur corrective action by using the bully pulpit and leverage over the \$562 billion of annual federal funding going to these three states. The fed-up (and desperate) west coast population centers will likely jump to demand implementation of a viable homeless solution such as Sunbreak if so offered. Note that a recent Los Angeles Times poll found that [95% of voters say homelessness is the city's biggest problem](#).

The essential (and indispensable) component of a civil society is rule of law. Without it, we have anarchy. Many people believe our courts will no longer allow for rule of law with respect to homeless street camping, but they are misunderstanding what the court is actually saying. The New York Times sums up the pertinent *Martin v. City of Boise* (2018) court decision: “A three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, in San Francisco, ruled for the plaintiffs and struck down the laws, saying the Constitution does not allow prosecuting people for sleeping outdoors [if there is no shelter available](#).”

With 12 operational Sunbreaks, shelter will now be available. Thus, the three West Coast states will have met the court's conditions and can return to enforcing the rule of law on their streets and canyons.

Most significantly, 12 operational Sunbreaks will provide nearly every homeless person on the West Coast with the attention and services they need, as well as enable the clean-up of our feces and trash laden cities and natural environments. Furthermore, taxpayers will save a fortune.

San Diego is the best positioned West Coast city to host the first Sunbreak and become the national proof of concept. It has the nation's finest year-round weather and ample adjacent federal lands, making it the perfect test site. If Sunbreak proves successful in San Diego, the “Federal Leadership, Local Control” homeless strategy can be quickly replicated up the West Coast, and then across the nation.

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Times of San Diego article:

<https://timesofsandiego.com/opinion/2020/07/22/short-term-band-aids-wont-end-homelessness-but-our-plan-will/>

George Mullen biography:

<https://studiorevolution.com/about-george-mullen/>

Brian Caster biography:

<https://www.castergrp.com/about-us/team/>