

## THE GAZETTE'S VIEWPOINT

# Dems' loyalty to trial lawyers undermines affordable housing

Espousing concern for the poor, Democrats talk about "affordable housing." Monday, a committee of Colorado's House Democrats left us wondering how much they truly care. They had a chance to allow more entry-level homes by passing Senate Bill 177. Instead, they favored the demands of trial lawyers — special-interest benefactors who help them win elections.

Growing demand in a housing market raises prices. It works against "affordable housing." The only sustainable counterforce to this intractable economic truth is more supply. When builders invest in more housing stock, their actions reduce the rate of soaring prices. If they build enough, relative to demand, they may even lower sales prices and rents.

As a top attraction for young adults, Colorado has a growing demand for entry-level housing. Builders naturally desire to construct more condominiums and townhouses to profit from this demand.

They want to build in Colorado Springs, Denver, all along the Front Range and out west to Grand Junction. Yet, they hold back. Most have given the same reason for years: Lawsuits by predatory lawyers make these projects too risky. What should be good investments are made bad by inevitable and unreasonable litigation.

It's all because Colorado's construction defects statute turns lawsuits against build-

ers into low-risk, high-reward investments for trial attorneys. The law stacks the deck against builders, encouraging lawyers to seek disproportionate rewards rather than reasonable solutions to leaky windows, faulty foundations and other common problems. In the end, homeowners lose, prospective buyers and renters lose, builder lose, trial lawyers win and almost nothing gets built.

SB 177 proposed reasonable reforms to protect builders and buyers alike. Builders testified the law would get them building affordable housing again.

"Construction defects are severely slowing the construction of for-sale, affordable housing," said Denver Mayor Michael Hancock, one of a few Democrats hoping to fix the law. "There are awesome opportunities for people to live, work and play near transit, and that's not happening."

Instead, Hancock explained during a news conference Monday, 50,000 people will move to Denver in the next five years and drive up prices. Instead of filling demand, builders will continue avoiding the snares of trial attorneys.

Despite compelling testimony, the House "kill committee" followed orders and defeated the bill on a 6-5 party line vote. Those trial lawyers are important allies come election time. They are more important, it seems, than people in need of affordable homes.