

# Neel Kashkari's 'homeless' stay in Fresno irks GOP mayor

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Republican gubernatorial hopeful Neel Kashkari's faux-hobo trip to Fresno may have cost him at least one vote.

When [Ashley Swarengin](#), the Republican candidate for state controller, was asked at a [Sacramento Press Club](#) lunch if she would vote for Kashkari, she said she "was still evaluating the candidates."

Swarengin is the mayor of Fresno and suggested that she wasn't thrilled to have Kashkari and his film crew drop by unannounced for a week in July to show how tough it is to be homeless in California's fifth-largest city.

Kashkari said he looked unsuccessfully for work, ate at a homeless shelter and was repeatedly rousted by police.

"I've never met" Kashkari, Swarengin said Tuesday. She first heard about the candidate's visit, she said, the night before Kashkari's essay about his time on the streets ran in the [Wall Street Journal](#) and his 10-minute video featuring the worst of Fresno was released by his campaign.

If Kashkari had stopped by City Hall, Swarengin said, she could have shown him new, low-income housing and other efforts that are under way in Fresno to ease the city's homeless problem.

Trying to make lemonade out of what Fresno viewed as a lemon of a video, Swarengin said her takeaway from Kashkari's experience was "how well he was treated by everyone in the city," even the police officers who told the candidate for governor to "move along" when he tried to sleep on a park bench.

It's not surprising that Swarengin and other Central Valley Republicans might be miffed that Kashkari picked Fresno as a prime example of the problems of poverty and homelessness. Not only is Fresno one of California's few large cities with a GOP mayor, but the Central Valley is a Republican stronghold that Kashkari needs to win big to have any chance of beating Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) in November. Kashkari could have selected any one of several Democratic strongholds with homelessness problems, such as San Francisco or Oakland, to make his point.

But Swarengin's resounding "maybe" to Kashkari's candidacy didn't cause any hard feelings, at least publicly.

"Neel enthusiastically supports Mayor Swarengin and looks forward to voting for her and the entire Republican ticket," [Mary-Sarah Kinner](#), a spokeswoman for Kashkari, said in a statement Wednesday. "As Neel has said, a goal of his campaign is to help down-ticket Republicans to rebuild the party, and electing Mayor Swarengin as controller is a big step in that direction."

Kashkari's view of Fresno isn't the only place where he and Swarengin disagree. Like many other Central Valley politicians, the mayor is a supporter of California's high-speed-rail plan, which Kashkari has dubbed "the crazy train."

The train, which would run through the Central Valley on its way from the Bay Area to Southern California, "makes sense for Fresno," Swarengin said. She complimented Brown for supporting the train, said he had improved the financial plan for the system and was "putting amazing people on the (high-speed-rail) board."

Moving away from Kashkari might not be a bad political move for Swarengin, either, because she is running a much closer race for controller against Democrat Betty Yee of Alameda, a [Board of Equalization](#) member, than Kashkari is against Brown.