

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Wrong Response to Airbnb

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Although new technologies bring problems, they mostly make our lives better. No city should know that better than Irvine, a global center for innovation in many fields.

Which is why we're disappointed at its crackdown in online vacation rental services, such as Airbnb. These services use smartphone apps or computers to rent out rooms, or entire homes, for people on vacation. Stays commonly are a couple of days.

"Citing rules about hotel taxes and zoning laws that ban hotels from residential neighborhoods, city code enforcement officials have issued written warnings to nearly 70 people offering their properties for rent online," with most warnings over the past 15 months, the Register reported. "Though such crackdowns aren't unheard of ... Irvine is suppressing the practice without a public hearing."

This month, Anaheim's City Council extended by a year its moratorium on short-term rentals as it mulls regulations. And Laguna Beach's moratorium is set to expire in October.

We understand concerns about renters partying, littering and otherwise causing problems. But those negatives can be dealt with through enforcement of noise and nuisance ordinances.

Airbnb and other companies, such as ride-booking services Uber and Lyft, enable "micro entrepreneurship," Matthew Feeney told us; the Cato Institute scholar has written often on this controversy. "This is a trend lawmakers and regulators ought to welcome. Regrettably, some officials have cracked down on Airbnb hosts, claiming that homeowners are violating local regulations that govern hotels. It is inappropriate for private homes to be regulated as if they are hotels."

As to objections by hotels that it's unfair they have to follow regulations and pay taxes the Airbnb homes avoid, Mr. Feeney said the solution is "deregulating the hospitality industry in order to ensure that it can compete with new upstarts on a level playing field." Indeed, despite the city's opposition, the Register reported that, in September, 370 Irvine homes were listed on Airbnb.

The future prosperity of Irvine – and the rest of Orange County – lies in freeing technological innovation, not suppressing it.