



HUD Braces For Carson Rule

HUD's civil service workforce is in turmoil over the prospect of Dr. Ben Carson's installation as HUD secretary in January, provided the Senate confirms him.

Meanwhile, Carson has not made an attempt to visit HUD and receive a brief review of what hurdles he faces. Carson has been receiving a review of his responsibilities from former HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson, secretary during the second term of President George W. Bush.

A four-person transition team is said to be cataloging Obama administration hires, particularly political appointees who burrowed into the civil service ranks.

Carson's detractors point to his lack of government administrative ability, but that may work to his benefit if he surrounds himself with canny administrative deputies, particularly a chief deputy and an accountant.

Carson's first mission is the selection of a deputy secretary to run the department's day-to-day operations. That selection likely will signal how Carson intends to manage the 8,300-person workforce.

Before settling into a specific policy niche at HUD, apart from his chief role of glad-handing the Trump administration's approach to housing and urban affairs, Carson likely will tackle the maze of HUD and FHA regulations installed by the Obama administration and suspend many of them for review.

Sources tell HAL that Carson likely will focus on health in public and subsidized housing while diminishing what a Trump administration targets as social engineering rules such as the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule. President-elect Donald Trump has declared AFFH one of his first rule rescission targets. Carson has vigorously opposed the rule as well.

Suspending AFFH enforcement would upend the department's new operational blueprint. But Carson comes in at a time when groups dealing with HUD say the department must do more to address the health of those living in federally subsidized housing. Carson could establish a new strategy to help ease dismantling of the transformation.

Studies show that housing has significant effect on both physical and mental health. HUD so far has taken steps to eradicate lead residue in subsidized housing and eliminate smoking on all public property.

Carson now has the opportunity to amplify the connection between safe and healthy housing and overall individual health.

But while Carson has a ready-made platform for his expertise, he also has a troublesome mountain of mismanagement to climb, including dismantling much of the remaining operational transformation undertaken by the Obama administration and reorganizing the department's scrambled financial books.

Former HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan took HUD in a new direction by emphasizing a streamlined rental housing policy and program while rewriting regulations governing Fair Housing Act enforcement. Emphasis on the two policies set most other HUD programs adrift without adequate department oversight -- key HUD workers were shifted to new duties to enhance the transformation.

The shifts left HUD's ability to account for how and where money is spent in such poor shape the department's inspector general wasn't able to provide an opinion on its financial health. The IG report, which applied the words "weakness" or "weaknesses" more than 40 times to describe HUD's accounting practices, concludes that the department is unable to track where the \$49 billion it receives annually is spent.

All this has HUD workers and housing lobbies worried that Carson will pursue a conservative agenda directly at odds with current policies they champion, including new restrictions or complete abandonment of HUD subsidies considered as fostering a culture of over reliance on government subsidies.

Among the changes housing advocates see coming are the imposition of strict work requirements for federal housing aid and limits on the amount of time tenants can remain in public housing or on Section 8 vouchers.

And Carson will have to contend with ever increasing budget cuts as the new administration focuses on infrastructure, defense spending, and reduction of the national debt -- all reducing Carson's range of management options.

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