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## HUD Continues Operational Struggle

HUD Secretary Ben Carson had to wait nearly a month to swear in four new appointed executives ostensibly because at least one of the nominees was not in town to take the oath. Customarily, a nominee confirmed by the Senate is sworn in the same day or quickly thereafter.

Apparently, at least one of the four couldn't break away from home to travel to Washington for the swearing in, so all four waited until Jan. 12 for the formal oath-taking. The Senate confirmed one on Dec. 18, and the remaining three were confirmed on Dec. 21, all before Congress departed for the holidays.

The delay has become one of Carson's trademarks after receiving HUD as a consolation prize after challenging President Donald Trump for the Republican nomination in 2016. Carson, who accepted the post even though he had no housing experience, has a lackadaisical approach to a job which inside the Beltway wags call a traditional Cabinet post for minority candidates -- primarily African-American and Hispanic. And Trump apparently regards it as such, beckoning Carson for advantageous photo opportunities or dispatching him to glad-hand at largely minority events.

Carson initially spoke of big changes at HUD, including elimination of what he termed "social engineering" rules and regulations crafted by the Obama administration, primarily the Small Area Fair Market Rent rule and the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule. Carson suspended the former rule last year, but it was subsequently ordered restored by a federal judge. HUD indicates it won't challenge the decision.

But on the AFFH rule, which Trump heralded during his campaign as an Obama administration initiative he wanted to scrap, likely will remain, even though Carson recently delayed it for two years largely to gather more public comments. But sources tell *HAL* that, if challenged in court and reversed, the AFFH suspension will not be challenged. At the same time, HUD's move to instruct regional and local agencies on data compilation to comply with the rule remains in effect (*see HAL, 01-05-2018 Issue #18-01*).

HUD's rank-and-file workforce rarely sees Carson. When he is not traveling, the secretary remains closeted in his 10th floor executive suite. He is largely silent on critical housing issues and sticks to HUD's chief talking points when addressing Congress, an occasion which his handlers appear to dread.

His discontent with the role is becoming more obvious. Recently, during a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday event in Atlanta, GA, Carson described his difficulties with Trump during a speech at Ebenezer Baptist Church. He was quoted as saying, "And I don't agree with the president about everything he says. I don't even agree with everything that I said in the past."

Despite Carson's initial assertions of a bold, new approach to HUD, his only achievement after a year in office -- aside from doling out appropriations for HUD initiatives -- is the SAFMR rule delay.

Meanwhile, HUD offices remain vacant. Trump's nominee to head the Federal Housing Administration -- Brian Montgomery -- was only approved by the Senate Banking Committee this week after a several week delay, and it was moved to the Senate floor for a vote. If Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) sticks to his previous strategy of holding up such votes, Montgomery will wait weeks for full Senate confirmation, well past the one-year anniversary of Trump's inauguration.

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