



Ben Carson Hunkers Down On Criticism

It has been a long six weeks for HUD Secretary Ben Carson following disclosure he and his wife chose a hand-crafted dining suite for HUD's executive dining room and then lied to Congress about his direct involvement in the purchase.

That disclosure followed intensifying criticism that Carson pays scant attention to his HUD duties and is intent on changing the department's ideological direction.

It appears Carson has weathered the criticism over the dining suite purchase (later rescinded with no payment due) and he continues to have President Donald Trump's support. That support apparently reflects the absence of ethical questions. Carson's problems so far apparently revolve around the question of his miscalculation of executive perks and bad professional advice.

Carson is Trump's principal link to the African-American community and, unless Carson commits a major political faux pas, he is likely to remain in the Cabinet post.

Another storm is brewing though, but it already has White House support -- the rephrasing of HUD's mission statement. The move prompted several prominent California Democrats, led by Sen. Kamala Harris (D-C) who has emerged as one of Trump's principal foes, to turn up the pressure on Carson. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) joins Harris in the effort. They call on Carson to not make any changes in the mission statement.

"These changes to the HUD mission statement would erase decades worth of progress and bring back an era in which people were denied housing based on the color of their skin," Harris declares in a strongly worded letter to the HUD secretary.

But the plea falls on deaf ears. Carson appears to be sticking with the new mission statement that is 40 words shorter than the department's direction developed during the Obama administration.

Critics -- including the National Urban League, National Association of realtors, and online real estate platform Zillow -- contend removal of certain words could signal a shift in HUD's mission, particularly in fair housing enforcement.

HUD's current mission statement: "HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. HUD is working to strengthen the housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers, meet the need for quality affordable

homes, utilize housing as a platform for improving the quality of life; build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination, and transform the way HUD does business.”

The proposed changes read as follows: ‘HUD’s mission is to ensure Americans have access to fair affordable housing and opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency, thereby strengthening our communities and nation.’”

Reaction was swift and strong, but critics have been unable to build enough of a case against the change to challenge it legally. Opponents claim the removal of “free from discrimination” is enough cause for alarm and rebuke of the change.

Carson’s response was equally firm and an immediate pushback on objections. “You can be sure of one thing -- any mission statement for this Department will embody the principle of fairness as a central element of everything we do,” Carson said in a prepared statement.

“HUD must lead by example and commit to expand its work to eliminating housing discrimination, in which HUD has been a champion,” the California Democrats replied.

Other California lawmakers joining the plea to Carson include: Reps. Jared Huffman (D), Jerry McNerney (D), Mark DeSaulnier (D), Barbara Lee (D), and Mike Thompson (D). The lawmakers want Carson to respond by April 9.