



Senate Quagmire Cripples HUD

It is nearly two years into the Trump administration and HUD remains bogged down in its ability to operate while key department and program head nominees wait for the Senate to confirm their nominations.

The dilemma was magnified in a recent NBC news report that the department's failure to oversee and penalize bad landlords in the federal Section 8 program is the fault staffing problems caused by President Donald Trump and HUD Secretary Ben Carson. NBC used an investigation of HUD by ProPublica as the basis of its report, but that report ignored key details of the investigation.

Oversight of contracted Section 8 project-based landlords is the responsibility of HUD's Office of Public & Indian Housing. That office has not had a leader who can make decisions and sign off on strategies since the Jan. 20, 2017 end of the Obama administration.

The news story blamed Trump and Carson for HUD's staffing problems which it alluded is the cause of the department's inability to oversee housing problems.

HUD staff reductions were undertaken in the previous administration when the department staff dropped from more than 9,300 in 2010 to fewer than 7,000 employees today, and more than 1,000 of those were hired in one fell swoop late in the administration.

The principal glitch in the staffing dilemma is the status of Hunter Kurtz, Trump's nominee to head the PIH office as assistant secretary. PIH, with control of the Section 8 and public housing programs, commands control over more than three-quarters of the department's annual budget. It would be Kurtz's responsibility to bring the PIH staff to its full complement to ensure smooth program oversight.

Yet the Kurtz nomination has been in Senate limbo for 14 months. Kurtz was first nominated in September 2017, and he cleared Senate Banking Committee scrutiny on Oct. 26. But Senate Democrats blocked a full Senate vote using cloture, a process of forcing the maximum 30 hours of debate for a presidential nominee.

Trump re-nominated Kurtz on Jan. 8, 2018, and his nomination has been stalled since then.

Kurtz joins other HUD appointments whose nominations remain on the Senate backburner indefinitely as a result of Democrat opposition. They include Seth Appleton, nominee for assistant secretary for Policy Development & Research; Suzanne Israel Tufts to be assistant secretary for administration; Michael Bright to be president of Ginnie Mae; and Rae Oliver Davis to be HUD's inspector general.

11/30/18 1:08 PM