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## Landlord Loyalty, Interest In Question

One of HUD Secretary Ben Carson's first moves when he moved in the top seat in mid-2017 was to map a plan to attract landlords to the Section 8 housing voucher program and keep edgy landlords in the subsidized housing fold.

Carson set up a series of listening sessions across the country over the coming months armed with selling points and multiple inducements to seduce landlords to accept vouchers or HUD contracts to house subsidized tenants.

Carson saw the initiative as necessary to reverse an acceleration of landlords leaving the program when their contracts expired or their subsidized mortgage loans were paid in full. Others were simply reluctant to accept low-income tenants because of the government requirements involved and the negative reputation Section 8 had acquired.

While Carson has yet to unveil the results of the months-long effort, reports indicate a largely unsuccessful effort with landlords, while interested, remain unconvinced they could deal with mountains of government paperwork, frequent inspections, and unreliable and abusive tenants.

Now, the 35-day government shutdown, which put HUD's operations in neutral and sent shudders through the public and subsidized housing programs, has set HUD back considerably and possibly irreparably.

Longtime landlords were reminded of earlier qualms over HUD funding cycles, such as during the George W. Bush administration when the department scrambled to find money to fulfill contracts when project-based Section 8 budgets ran out of money.

The latest shutdown magnified those concerns and more, including a lingering suspicion the Trump administration will eventually begin trimming all Section 8 funding in what Republicans consider an ever expanding program out of financial control.

Political liberals want to expand subsidized housing with annual increases to the number of Section 8 housing vouchers available, increase the value of vouchers to allow families to compete in high-rent neighborhoods, and expand the Section 8 program to encompass much of the country's rental housing.

That expansion includes conversion of all public housing into a private-public consortium composed of public housing authorities, private landlords and rental-housing conglomerates subsidized under a single-payer platform funded by Congress and operated by HUD.

That platform now exists in a fledgling form under the umbrella of the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, a scaled-down version of the Obama administration's Transforming Rental Assistance initiative which was scrapped in 2012 as too radical for the time. It was replaced with RAD.

The Trump administration embraced the RAD concept, convinced by HUD that it was the only way to salvage deteriorating public housing units that ran up a rehabilitation estimate of \$26 billion in a 2010 HUD study. That estimate now hovers around \$50 billion to protect the 1.1 million public housing units in the HUD portfolio.

Consequently, the Trump administration concluded that RAD public-private approach was the only way to salvage public housing as an emergency safety net.

But the shutdown has landlords openly wondering if the federal government commitment to RAD and eventual single-payer rental housing is firm or exposed to the whim of whichever administration holds power at time. That distrust is mounting.

The shutdown prevented HUD from renewing contracts with hundreds of landlords, and while the department is now back in operation, the questions linger over a program that subsidizes housing for more than 4 million families.

The inflamed political and social environment complicated by legislative gridlock and inability to reach a consensus on government spending has landlords in a holding pattern waiting to see how and if the political climate will moderate sufficiently for them to accept government constraints in return for a steady source of rent money through Section 8.

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