



*By Sarah Torrico, CEDAM Policy Intern*

On January 12th, Ben Carson addressed question presented by a Senate committee in a hearing for his nomination for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Many expressed their support of Dr. Carson, with the meeting beginning with five bipartisan letters of support from members of HUD, and an introduction from fellow former GOP candidate Marco Rubio who spoke of his admiration for Carson.

However, many were concerned with the inconsistencies between ideas that Carson has expressed during his hearing and what he has stated in the past, including statements made during his run for presidency. Senator Sherrod Brown from Ohio was the first to voice concern with the comments that the former neurosurgeon had made in 2015 about HUD and the Fair Housing Act, in which he referred to them as examples of “failed socialism”. Carson said that his quote had been distorted and that his only issue is with the top-down approach from Washington.

On the issue of discrimination, Dr. Carson was asked about how he interpreted the responsibility of HUD to protect the LGBTQ community, to which he stated that all Americans are to be protected by the law, adding however that “no one gets *extra* rights”. The Fair Housing Act (FHA), which aims to eliminate housing discrimination

especially in terms of race and national origin, was said by Carson to be “one of best legislation we’ve had” when asked if he would continue to enforce it. The FHA’s new rule that requires communities to assess any patterns of racism on the local level and to form individual solutions would be, Carson said, continued under the new administration.

Senator Brown voiced concern over the future funding for HUD, which he said is already so underfunded that it only reaches one fourth of eligible families. Carson replied that his plan included cutting all assistance programs by 10% each year with no exceptions, to which Brown concluded by saying that he was interested to see how this will affect the lead crisis. Carson’s response to the budgeting concerns was his plan to hold a listening tour in which he would formulate “a world class plan”, but that he does not yet know what numbers will come out of that. The prospect of gutting the entire department appeared to remain a relevant concern to those in the room.

In justifying his limited-government approach, Carson shared his own story of having grown up in poverty and his family’s refusal to apply for public assistance. Senator Menendez shared that he had also come from a low-income background, but challenged the notion that poverty is a choice. When he questioned Carson about the possible cut off of assistance to more than 4.5 million low income residents, Carson agreed that nothing would be cut until an alternative path has been made. However when Senator Tillis asked Carson’s opinion on HUD’s duties, he again repeated that it is providing too much housing. Dr. Carson at times danced around the doubts that he would be able maintain HUD’s efforts to provide necessary assistance, saying that he

would rather focus on creating an environment where people did not need such assistance in the first place.

The potential hidden interests of President Trump were a concern for some congressmen who were unsure of Carson's ability to control the issue. Senator Heitkamp pointed out that even if Carson acts on moral decision making throughout his leadership, he cannot guarantee that funds will not go to benefit the Trump family as a result of Trump's refusal of a blind trust, pushing her proposed Presidential Conflicts of Interest Act as the solution. Senator Brown directed the conversation to Dr. Carson's role in the issue, asking if he is aware of Trump's investment in a Starret City housing project which Carson was aware of but had not discussed with President. This is the one known conflicted investment, though many expressed feeling that there are more. Carson said he believes that a suggestion to the President could be made and that he would report back to the Committee.

Dr. Carson came to the hearing with many ideas of his own, most involving preventative measures and involvement from the private sector. Apprenticeship program for residents, informative sessions for people looking to take on a mortgage and improvements to IT that would limit fraud and waste, all reflect Carson's larger initiative to end the reliance on housing assistance. In treating the high rates of homeless veterans, Dr. Carson calls for a more holistic approach, suggesting that each service member be assigned a support group upon entrance into the military that would remain post-discharge. This, he says, will address underlying causes such as post-traumatic stress disorder by more efficient means. He also supports keeping on HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. Incorporation of private money

could be the solution to the issue Carson describes as HUD's inefficient spending. As an example he describes the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) in which a private developer in Detroit helped to decrease blight and ended up saving the city a lot of money. Senator Masto was not convinced, citing Nevada's foreclosure crisis resulting from such private investments, which Carson maintained was due to predatory investments which he would not permit. He also named private investment as his solution to having a 30 year mortgage without a government guarantee.

With the recent lead crisis, public health was a top priority. As it pertains to housing, Carson said that a plan to reduce public housing units where there are lead issues is crucial but that he remains cautious of "over regulating".

As of his approval on the 24th, many voiced feeling that the hearing was a success. Still, larger administrative concerns loom over President Trump's holdings as well as Dr. Carson's ability to manage improving livelihood while distancing HUD from government aid.