

selected as the adjudication officer at the VA Medical and Regional Office Center in Togus, Maine. Mr. Montgomery was named director of the Providence, Rhode Island VA Regional Office in 1980.

In February of 1995, he traveled to North Carolina to begin work in his current position as director of the VA Regional Office in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In this position, he has been responsible for administering federal benefits to 790,000 veterans and their families living in North Carolina. These services total more than \$1.2 billion in annual benefit payments.

The Winston-Salem Regional Office provides benefits and services in all program areas to veterans, service-members, and reservists residing in North Carolina. These programs include compensation, pension, loan guarantee, and vocational rehabilitation.

From 1995 to 2007, Mr. Montgomery oversaw the growth of the Winston-Salem Office from 240 employees to 530 employees. During this period, the office grew to the second largest disability office in the United States.

In 2005, he was successful in having Winston-Salem selected as one of only two national benefits delivery at discharge sites at regional offices. This achievement created an additional 55 professional full-time positions and helped to ensure that the regional office would be a key player in the VA for many years to come.

As director, Mr. Montgomery has supported the veteran community in hiring practices as well as in claims disability work. Of the 516 employees hired at the regional offices in the last 10 years, 260 were veterans, and of that number, 127 were disabled veterans.

Each year, I visit the Winston-Salem Regional Office to learn about the work being done there and, more importantly, to personally thank the VA employees for all they do on behalf of our Nation's veterans. It was during one of these visits that I was struck by a letter I saw hanging on the wall of Mr. Montgomery's office. His family had received a letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt after losing a loved one in World War II. And I quote President Roosevelt's letter.

"He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live and grow, and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives, in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."

I am so grateful that my friendship with Mr. Montgomery led me to this wonderful quote, which I have since shared in my own letters to families who have lost a loved one in Afghanistan or Iraq.

During my visits, Mr. Montgomery has generously acted as my guide and has introduced me to employees and visiting veterans. I have witnessed firsthand all of the great work being done by Mr. Montgomery and his staff to take care of our Nation's veterans.

They have excelled in their efforts to reduce the number of pending claims while still maintaining the accuracy of their case audits.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate Mr. Montgomery on his retirement and his long and successful career of service with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Through his work on behalf of our Nation's veterans, he has earned the respect of so many people, and I know he will be missed.

John Montgomery, thank you for a job well done. I wish you all the best for a long and happy retirement. May God bless you and your family in the years ahead, and may God bless our men and women in uniform, and may God bless America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE HOUSING STIMULUS PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, The Politico, a newspaper that is published and distributed here in the Congress, has an article today about how hard the Democrats are working to address the housing stimulus plan that the American people are waiting for.

In places like Ohio, the mortgage foreclosure rate is at all-time highs, and Washington seems to be frozen. There was a program passed here that I voted for for housing counseling to try to help workouts a few months ago; and then I learned that, in a community as hard struck as northern Ohio is, it yielded \$60,000. \$60,000 in a region where hundreds and hundreds of people are losing their homes.

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Washington doesn't seem to be able to match the reality of what is happening across this country.

A newspaper today reports that Senator CHRIS DODD from the other body stated that "Congress needs cooperation. This is not a partisan issue. Our economy is in trouble. We need people to step up and recognize it is Americans that are at risk, and it is America that is at risk."

The figures state that in another sign of distressed housing markets, home equity dipped below 50 percent, an historic low for our Nation. Home mortgage volume fell by 17.5 percent last quarter, and pending home sales also are reaching new lows. We know what the reality is. And yet today, all the major papers had lead stories about the resignation of the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Mr. Alphonso Jackson. USA Today reports: "HUD chief departure a blow to President.

"For the first time in President Bush's tenure, one of his Cabinet members is stepping down amid a criminal investigation."

The article continues: "The FBI has been investigating the ties between Mr. Jackson and a friend who was paid \$392,000 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a construction manager in New Orleans, according to the Associated Press." It is quite a long story about that resignation.

And then in the Washington Post, the same sort of story, "Jackson Resigns as HUD Secretary, Longtime Bush Friend is Facing Cronyism Investigation."

Mr. Jackson announced his resignation yesterday, leaving the Bush administration without a top housing official in the midst of this vast mortgage crisis which has shaken not just the American economy but the global economy.

The New York Times lead editorial today: "Put the Housing Back in HUD." Boy, can we underline that.

It talks about what a sad commentary it is on the Bush administration's low regard for HUD's mission that Mr. Jackson was permitted to remain in office for so long. And it points out in 2006, an inspector general's report found Mr. Jackson had urged his staff members to favor Mr. Bush's supporters when it awarded contracts. And more recently, the Philadelphia Housing Authority sued Mr. Jackson, charging he had threatened to take away \$50 million from that authority because its president would not turn over valuable property to a developer with ties to Mr. Jackson. He has refused to answer the Senate's questions about the matter, and the Times ends with this admonition: "Mr. Jackson's resignation clears the way for President Bush to name a top caliber successor, given the seriousness of the mortgage crisis." It should also be an occasion to reflect on the cost of appointing HUD secretaries whose priorities are politics and patronage rather than housing and urban development, which was the mission of HUD from the very beginning.

We are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report; and as we look at the disaster we are facing in housing across this country that demands a national response, to have the major official here in our Nation's capital have to step down under a cloud of wrongdoing, and to have no one in place, a team of people who can really reach out to the American people and help as many of them as possible hold onto their largest form of savings, which is their home, is an absolute national disgrace.

It seems like the organizations that are here in our Nation's capital aren't really serious about helping the American people to hold onto their most prized possession after their family, their home, for heaven's sake.

You really wonder what has been going on inside that administration,

what has been going on on Wall Street with people walking away with tens of millions of dollars in fees, and the American people's equity just being washed down the drain.

I recommend to the President that he go beyond appointing a person of high repute to the office of Secretary of HUD and have a strike team in the White House that can deal with every region of this country being so hard hit in this mortgage crisis.

Madam Speaker, I will include the articles for the RECORD.

[From the USA Today, Apr. 1, 2008]

HUD CHIEF DEPARTURE A BLOW TO PRESIDENT
(By David Jackson)

WASHINGTON.—For the first time in President Bush's tenure, one of his Cabinet members is stepping down amid a criminal investigation.

Housing Secretary Alphonso Jackson, a longtime Bush ally from Texas, said Monday he'll leave his post on April 18. He announced his departure on the fourth anniversary of his Senate confirmation.

The FBI has been investigating the ties between Jackson and a friend who was paid \$392,000 by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department as a construction manager in New Orleans, according to the Associated Press. Jackson's friend got the job after Jackson allegedly asked a HUD staffer to pass along his name to the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

Other Bush Cabinet members, such as former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, have left office under political clouds. But Jackson, 62, is the highest ranking Bush official to depart in this manner. Last June, former deputy Interior secretary Steven Griles was convicted and sent to prison for lying to a congressional panel about the access and favors he gave to lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

James Thurber, who directs the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University, said Jackson's resignation is not good news for Bush as he seeks political leverage with Congress and tries to stay relevant during an intense presidential campaign to succeed him.

"This is the last thing that he needs," Thurber said.

Separately, Jackson and HUD still face a federal lawsuit by the Philadelphia Housing Authority, accusing Jackson of retaliating against that agency because it refused to turn over land to one of his developer friends.

Carl Greene, executive director of the Philadelphia agency, told USA TODAY that Jackson "orchestrated a series of procedural and enforcement actions" designed to deprive his agency of federal funds.

Greene said his lawyers still may want to question Jackson, but his main goal is to get the department "to allow us to continue carrying out our mission."

HUD official Mark Studdert said in a March 19 letter the federal government was not retaliating against the Philadelphia agency, but was citing it for not being in compliance with federal law on tenants with physical disabilities.

Jackson did not mention the federal investigation or the lawsuit during his brief announcement. "There comes a time when one must attend diligently to personal and family matters," said Jackson, without taking questions from reporters.

The resignation came 10 days after Democratic Sens. Patty Murray of Washington and Chris Dodd of Connecticut urged Bush to remove Jackson, citing "the clouds of justice

Department investigations and reports of an empaneled grand jury" at a time of nationwide mortgage failures.

Bush, who flew early Monday to Kiev, Ukraine, issued a statement saying he accepted Jackson's resignation with regret. A friend of Jackson since they both lived in Dallas in the early 1990s, Bush said, "I have known him to be a strong leader and a good man."

In 2006, the Dallas Business Journal reported Jackson said that he rejected a contract with one man who told him he did not like Bush. That led to a report by the HUD inspector general that Jackson told employees to consider political affiliation when deciding contracts. The inspector general said there was no evidence that contracts were actually awarded on such a basis.

Jackson told the inspector general that the report of his comments in Dallas was not true.

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 1, 2008]

JACKSON RESIGNS AS HUD SECRETARY

(By Dan Eggen and Carol D. Leonnig)

Embattled Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson announced his resignation yesterday, leaving the Bush administration without a top housing official in the midst of a vast mortgage crisis that has shaken the global economy.

Jackson, a longtime friend and former neighbor of President Bush, departed after the White House concluded he had too many controversies swirling around him to be an effective Cabinet member, several HUD officials said privately.

Jackson has been accused of favoritism involving HUD contractors for two years, and the FBI and the Justice Department are investigating whether he steered business to friends.

Several Democratic lawmakers demanded Jackson's resignation last month after he refused to answer questions about the accusations including a lawsuit filed by the Philadelphia Housing Authority against HUD that alleged Jackson and his aides used the department to punish the authority for refusing to transfer valuable property to one of Jackson's friends.

[From the New York Times, Apr. 1, 2008]

PUT THE HOUSING BACK IN HUD

As relieved as we were to see Alphonso Jackson resign on Monday as the secretary of housing and urban development, it was a sad comment on the Bush administration's low regard for HUD's mission that Mr. Jackson was permitted to remain in office so long.

Mr. Jackson offered the usual excuse for resigning; his family, apparently, needs to see more of him. It's evident, though that his resignation has something to do with the ongoing investigation of Mr. Jackson for allegedly using his position for partisan politics and to reward friends. Even this administration, with its high tolerance for that sort of behavior, no doubt considered it untenable—finally—to have such a dubious housing chief when home mortgages are in crisis.

Mr. Jackson made little impression in either housing or urban development. He did make headlines in April 2006, however, when he boasted that he had taken a contract away because the contractor had been critical of President Bush. "Why should I reward someone who doesn't like the president, so they can use funds to try to campaign against the president?" The Dallas Business Journal quoted him as saying in a speech.

Mr. Jackson later said that he was lying when he talked about awarding contracts for political reasons, but an inspector general's

report later that year found that Mr. Jackson had urged his staff members to favor Mr. Bush's supporters when it awarded contracts.

More recently, the Philadelphia Housing Authority sued Mr. Jackson, charging that he had threatened to take away \$50 million because its president would not turn over valuable property to a developer with ties to Mr. Jackson. He has refused to answer the Senate's questions about the matter.

Federal authorities are also reportedly investigating whether he steered housing contracts in New Orleans and the Virgin Islands to friends.

HUD has a long history of mismanagement and corruption, which has been particularly pronounced in Republican administrations. That is most likely because with rare exceptions, like former HUD Secretary Jack Kemp, Republicans do not seem to believe in the agency's mission. Samuel Pierce, the HUD secretary for all eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency, defended Mr. Reagan's sharp cuts in subsidized housing. He presided over a department mired in scandals, including ones that led to criminal convictions of several of his aides.

President Bush consistently backed Mr. Jackson, as recently as last month after Senators Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington, and Christopher Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, called for his dismissal. But questions kept mounting about Mr. Jackson's integrity at a time when his department's Federal Housing Administration has an important role to play in trying to stave off foreclosures.

Mr. Jackson's resignation clears the way for Mr. Bush to name a top-caliber successor, given the seriousness of the mortgage crisis. It should also be an occasion to reflect on the cost of appointing HUD secretaries whose priorities are politics and patronage rather than housing and urban development.

SUNSET MEMORIAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Madam Speaker, I stand once again before this body with yet another Sunset Memorial.

It is April 1, 2008, in the land of the free and the home of the brave, and before the sun set today in America, almost 4,000 more defenseless unborn children were killed by abortion on demand—just today. That is more than the number of innocent American lives that were lost on September 11th, only it happens every day.

It has now been exactly 12,853 days since the travesty called Roe v. Wade was handed down. Since then, the very foundation of this Nation has been stained by the blood of almost 50 million of our own children.

Some of them, Madam Speaker, cried and screamed as they died, but because it was amniotic fluid passing over their vocal cords instead of air, we couldn't hear them.

All of them had at least four things in common.

They were each just little babies who had done nothing wrong to anyone. Each one of them died a nameless and lonely death. And each of their mothers, whether she realizes it immediately or not, will never be the same. And all the gifts that these children might have brought to humanity are now lost forever.

Yet even in the full glare of such tragedy, this generation clings to a blind, invincible ignorance while history repeats itself and our