

mandate of HUD and to learning more from the people who are directly affected by HUD policies. He has also received bipartisan letters of support from four former HUD Secretaries—Henry Cisneros, former Senator Mel Martinez, Alphonso Jackson, and Steven Preston—who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

He has said he plans to continue his conversation with the American people and do a listening tour if confirmed. This is an encouraging sign that Dr. Carson wants to hear from stakeholders and, more importantly, from the American people.

There are many HUD issues to be addressed. Once confirmed, we can begin working on several important issues under HUD's jurisdiction. Streamlining requirements for local public housing authorities, revising certain public housing programs, and strengthening financing for small and rural affordable housing developments are areas that should be addressed. Tackling homelessness, especially among our Nation's veterans, is another issue that is important to me and should be addressed.

It is critical that HUD allow local communities to craft solutions that work best for their needs. There has been bipartisan interest in several of these reforms over the years, and I am confident we can make progress once Dr. Carson is confirmed.

Dr. Carson has consistently demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of his fellow Americans, and his intellect, leadership, and life experiences are unique, valuable assets for leading an agency like HUD.

I urge my colleagues to vote in support of Dr. Carson's nomination so we can continue the great work of improving America's housing system.

Senator CORNYN very graciously gave me his time, which he was lined up to take first. He has asked if he could take his time at this point.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator CORNYN be next allowed to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the Chamber is too slowly moving forward on the President's Cabinet nominees. So far, this Chamber has confirmed 16 Cabinet nominees since January 20. I would note that the most recent nominee, Secretary ZINKE, was confirmed by a vote of 68 to 31 and that Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce, was confirmed by a vote of 72 to 27.

Why have we burned 5 weeks of this new administration and denied the President the staff and the help and the team he needs in order to lead the country? It makes no sense whatsoever.

I, once again, implore our friends on the other side of the aisle to stop the foot-dragging and the delay for delay's sake and to let the President have his Cabinet.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

Mr. President, I want to comment briefly on last night's address by President Trump to a joint session of Congress.

I think it is safe to say that the President had an extraordinary night last night. This is not just a view from a partisan, but, I think, on a bipartisan basis, people were enormously impressed by the vision the President laid out.

I have had some private conversations with colleagues on the floor, who have said to me, in essence, that this is an unusual and unconventional President but one who is clearly interested in making progress for the American people. He laid out a broad, welcoming vision of some of the things he wants to accomplish, but he did so in a way that welcomed Democrats and bipartisan support to help make that progress for the American people. I think they were somewhat surprised but gratified to hear the President make those sorts of remarks, and I congratulate President Trump for doing it.

Basically, he articulated an optimistic vision and a new direction for the country. This election, like the election back in 2008, was a change election. We have those every now and then. After one party is in power for 8 years, frequently, people say: We would like to try something different. We would like a change election.

We had a true change election in 2016.

The American people made clear that they wanted to get back in the game when they elected President Trump in November—by that I mean in terms of our American prosperity, our American strength, our American leadership in the world. President Trump talked about a new national pride and of cultivating a surge of economic security across the country. I think, at bottom, his speech was a message about confidence—confidence in the American people, confidence in our economic system, which has lifted more people out of poverty than has any other system the world has ever known, confidence that, unfortunately, had been lost during the Obama years that focused so much on self-doubt and America's role in the world—retreating from that role—unfortunately, leaving a void that has been filled, all too eagerly, by tyrants, dictators, and thugs, like Vladimir Putin, for example.

It is also true that this President was elected because, for too long, many people in this country had felt left out and felt like they just were not a part of the conversation we were having here about the great issues of the day. Many felt sidelined, even alienated, by irrelevant policy debates that had nothing to say to their quality of life in America. Many believed they truly didn't have a seat at the table.

President Trump's message throughout the campaign and now—about 5 weeks into his new administration—reflects, I think, the frustration and even

the angst many Americans had felt and the gratification now, as they feel like they have somebody who believes in what they believe and will not leave them on the sidelines.

I believe what President Trump represents is an antidote to what many people saw as wrong with Washington, DC. While it is true that President Trump has never held public office before—by all accounts, he is an unconventional political leader—last night, we heard he will work with all of us to actually do something about the concerns of hard-working American families. He will usher in a new era of renewed confidence in what the American people can accomplish together as we enter into, as he put it, a time of national rebuilding.

This is about restoring faith in the American dream. My parents were part of the "greatest generation"—of those who fought in World War II, who preserved America and a great future for their children and grandchildren. It sickens me, when I read public opinion polling, that too many people today say they do not see that better life—more secure, more prosperous—for their children and grandchildren in the future. What they are saying, in essence, is that we are losing faith in the American dream. I think what President Trump talked about last night is a renewed faith and a renewed commitment to the American dream, which means some sacrifice on the part of the present generation, not just in spending money we do not have and in racking up debt we will never repay and that our children and grandchildren will be saddled with.

Just as one example, President Trump talked about taking on this tepid economic recovery he inherited and turning it into a jobs machine that grows our economy for everyone. This is an optimistic message, as many have noted—it is Reaganesque, really, in its tone—in its talking about building the American economy and reestablishing America's leadership role in the world. I know it is just one indicator.

If you want to look at some objective measure of the American people's hopefulness and optimism about the future, all you need to do is to look at the stock market, as it has gone up 10 percent since President Trump was sworn in and closed at a record high for the 12th day in a row—a record that goes back to 1987. To me, that is saying that the markets and the American people are hopeful about what might be accomplished together under this administration.

One of the things we heard last night, as well, is a reflection of what Vice President PENCE has told us in private gatherings—I have heard him say it in public gatherings as well—which is that the administration is in the "promise-keeping business." Keeping your promises is important. How are you going to maintain the public's confidence when people say one thing when they are campaigning, and then,

once they are sworn into office, they forget about those promises and move on? I am grateful this administration believes in the importance of keeping promises.

We have already seen the President keep his promises to help rein in overreaching regulations; his commitment to reforming the Tax Code, which he talked about last night, so that the economy can grow again and we can all benefit; and his commitment to repealing and replacing the failed experiment of ObamaCare. All of these, he reiterated, he has begun to work on, and he has actually committed to seeing them through to completion. These just aren't talking points, these are promises he has already begun delivering on.

I am personally grateful—and I am sure the Presiding Officer is as well—that he has also reprioritized our national security. National security is just not one on a cafeteria plan that we can kind of walk into and say: I will take a little of this and a little of that. National security is the No. 1 priority for the Federal Government. No one else can do that. At a time when our country faces innumerable threats from all around the world, including terrorism here at home, I appreciate the fact that the President is committed to doing what it takes to restore our national security, to protect our borders, and to restore the rule of law.

I think it is just as simple as this: President is committed to getting back to the basics of governing. He is doing what he said he would do, and I find that reassuring, together with the outstanding Cabinet members he has selected to serve with him in his administration.

What America needs and what my constituents in Texas call, write, and ask me about all the time is a way forward that delivers security to our people, encourages prosperity for everyone, and instills confidence in the job creators and investors so we can enjoy a new era of prosperity for all of our people.

I am confident President Trump, in working closely with Congress, can deliver on these and many more promises he has made to the American people. It is obvious to me, from his comments last night, that he is welcoming and inviting our Democratic colleagues to stop the resistance—to stop the obstruction—and to actually come join us in helping to move the country forward. I find that refreshing and welcome, as I hope some of our colleagues will who still haven't quite gotten over the election on November 8 and the constituents they have who feel they are still in a protest mode. There is a time for competing in elections, and then there is a time for governing. That takes all of us, as adults who care deeply about our country, working together on a bipartisan basis to try to find common ground and move the American people's agenda forward.

I look forward to working with the President to make America a stronger,

safer, and more economically vibrant nation. That is something we all want and something we should all work together to achieve.

As I said, as we go forward, I hope our friends on the other side of the aisle look at the bigger picture. I have been here long enough to experience when people run for election—like many will do in 2018—and have no record of accomplishment to point to. I believe the Presiding Officer knows what I am talking about. Growing our economy and protecting our homeland should be bipartisan. It should be nonpartisan. And, as the President mentioned, now is the time to come together to unify as Americans to make our country stronger.

I hope all of our colleagues will join together, including our Democratic friends, to let us get to the work of legislating, to let us get off of this extended foot-dragging timetable on confirming the President's nominees for his Cabinet, especially when we are seeing votes like we saw on Mr. ZINKE and Mr. Ross—68 to 31, 72 to 27. There is no rationale for delaying those confirmations when our Democratic colleagues are voting to confirm them. We could have done this on January 20.

Mr. President, I thank my friend from Ohio for his courtesy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise in support of Dr. Carson for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. However, I just can't resist, as I listened to my friend Senator CORNYN—and I do like and respect Senator CORNYN, and I do mean that. It is always said here, but I actually do. I am just amused by the term "obstructionism." This President was 100 yards down the hall speaking last night and still hasn't put any legislative proposals forward—nothing on immigration except Executive orders; nothing on infrastructure even though Democrats have followed the four corners, if you will, of his proposal, \$1 trillion over 10 years—put ink to paper and actually written a real plan that includes public transit, that includes highways and bridges and water and sewer and housing and airports and ports and all of the things we do in doing it right on infrastructure, on public works. So we are all still waiting.

The President has made a lot of speeches. Last night he was not as combative as usual. That was welcome. I think we all, as Senator CORNYN said, applauded that. But we are still looking for substance. We are looking for one bill. Repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act—what does that mean? He still hasn't given us anything specific. They have been voting on replacing and repealing the Affordable Care Act for more than a decade, but they still don't have a plan.

If we listen to the Governor from my home State, the State where the Presiding Officer grew up—they should lis-

ten to our Republican Governor, who admonishes colleagues here: Don't repeal the Affordable Care Act unless you have a way to take care of 700,000 Ohioans who have lost their insurance under Medicaid; not to mention 100,000 who will lose their insurance who are on their parents' health plan; not to mention 100,000 who are on the exchanges; not to mention 100,000 seniors who are saving \$1,100 on their prescription drugs a year; not to mention 1 million Ohio seniors who get free, no copay, no deductible osteoporosis and diabetes screenings and physicals and all the things the Affordable Care Act gives them. They offer no proposals to replace any of those services. They talk about State lines, and they talk about health savings accounts, and they talk about tort reform. That is like this many people compared to this many people. They know that. Yet I still hear this talk of obstructionism. Give us stuff. Give us legislative proposals.

The assistant majority leader started off by talking about I guess a slow-walk of nominees. Now, I am the ranking Democrat, and my friend Senator CRAPO is now the chairman of the committee. He was not chairman then, and he is not mostly responsible for this. But I am on the Banking Committee, and last year, with a Democratic President—I don't want to look back and do tit-for-tat. It is not about that. It is about moving the country forward. But last year—what was it—25 to 30 nominees came from the President. Some were very significant, including the Export-Import Bank. Some were Federal Reserve. Some of them were inspectors general, and most people don't quite know what they do. But all nominees, more than 25, more than two dozen nominees—1 of them was confirmed by the Senate last year, 1 of 28 or so in our committee, and he was confirmed in December, in the 24th month of the 2-year term. So don't lecture us about people slow-walking and obstructionism and all of that. There were more than 25 nominees, and 1 of them was confirmed. SEC, Securities and Exchange Commission, didn't move; Federal Reserve, didn't move; the public transit administrator, didn't move—one after another after another. The Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial crimes didn't move. Even though he was originally a Bush nominee and then was promoted in the Obama years, he didn't even come to a vote because of whatever reason the Banking Committee gave us. So we don't need that lecture.

But more important, on these nominees, we all know the history. When I look at criticism and hear "Why aren't these nominees all passed?" let's look at about 6 or 8 months ago. Every Presidential candidate, until this last election, starts to put together a transition team in August, and President Trump—Candidate Trump began to do that but not with much seriousness. Then the person he had leading his

transition team he fired in November, soon after the election, so he had to start again. So he had no people kind of ready to go on these nominations, what, in fact, he was going to do on all of these Cabinet positions.

After that, he didn't really vet, he didn't really analyze, he didn't really look at the backgrounds of these nominees. So if they didn't do it—usually the President's people look at these nominees and analyze and see how corrupt they are, if they have conflicts of interest, all of that. Well, they didn't do that in this administration because apparently they didn't have time. So they nominated these people, and we have never seen this many conflicts of interest, we have never seen this kind of wealth, and we have never seen this many billionaires appointed to the Cabinet.

Just out of the Finance Committee, the Secretary of Health and Human Services bought and sold health care stocks of companies—on the floor of the House of Representatives, he was working on bills and amendments; yet he bought and sold hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of health care stock, and then he didn't tell the committee the full story.

The Secretary of the Treasury had a \$100 million investment he forgot to report. Maybe somebody out there would forget if they had a \$100 million investment. They might forget they had it, but most Americans wouldn't forget that. He lied to the committee. He lied to the committee about robo-signings. Hundreds of—and this was directly related to this nomination—hundreds of Ohioans, at least, maybe thousands, lost their homes—including in the Presiding Officer's home city where he grew up—because of these robo-signings.

So that is why this has been slowed down—because many of these nominees are unqualified for the jobs, many of them have conflicts of interest, and many of them have very complex financial holdings and portfolios that take a long time to sort through. That is the reason for the delay, and to accuse us of anything else is just playing politics.

As I said, I am here today to argue for the confirmation of Dr. Carson.

I voted for a number of these nominees when I thought they could offer something to our country. I voted against some of the most corrupt and some of the most out-of-step and some of the most far-right, radical nominees, and that list is, unfortunately, much longer with this President than any President in American history.

Dr. Carson had a distinguished career as a pediatric neurosurgeon. We know that about him, and that is good. His remarkable life story is well known to millions of Americans. We know that about him, and that is good. But he is not the nominee I would have chosen to lead HUD. In fact, he is not the nominee any President in my lifetime would have chosen to lead HUD be-

cause he has no direct experience with the housing and community development fields.

He made troubling statements on public policy issues prior to his nomination. My colleagues and I on the Banking Committee asked Dr. Carson several very direct questions about his views now that he is the nominee for Secretary of HUD. I will give Carson the benefit of the doubt—that is why I will vote for him—because he made commitments to me in person, sitting in my office, across the table, and he made commitments in the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee in his testimony and in his written responses.

Dr. Carson promises to address the scourge of lead hazards that threaten the health and the future of children in Ohio and nationwide.

Under oath, he pledged to uphold the Fair Housing Act and the housing rights of LGBTQ individuals. That wasn't what his past has been. He has made comments that I find offensive or worse about gay people in this country, but he made the commitment under oath to our committee that he would fight any discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation.

He has pledged to advocate for rental assistance and investment to end homelessness. He has pledged to push to include housing in the President's infrastructure plan.

Those are commitments he made. Those are commitments he made under oath. Those are commitments I will hold him to in spite of perhaps his prior philosophy of government and in spite of perhaps some of his comments he might have made in the past. My job is to hold him accountable for this. The job of everybody in this Senate, of both parties, is to hold him accountable.

Dr. Carson's responses to my questions for the record are available as part of the record of the Banking Committee's January 12, 2017, hearing on the nomination of Dr. Carson to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. I have also made them available online as part of my statement on the Banking Committee's approval of Dr. Carson's nomination on January 24, 2017.

My statement and the link to the questions for the record are available on the Banking Committee's website at <http://www.banking.senate.gov/public>.

Mr. President, as the ranking member of the Banking Committee—and I would emphasize the committee—while the last 2 years, it might only have been called banking, maybe it could have just been called Wall Street for the way it was running, but the full name of the committee is Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. It is important to remember that. We oversee housing policy, and I see how important this Department is for people in Ohio and across our country.

HUD is in charge of enforcing fair housing laws. It has been an essential partner in our national efforts to pre-

vent and end homelessness for veterans—something Senator CRAPO talked about—for the chronically homeless, and for youth and families. The Department's primary rental assistance program helped 4.5 million low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities find a place to call home—something that should be a right in this country.

HUD has assisted cities and towns in their efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and invest in communities and promote lead-safe, healthy housing for children. There is still a great challenge in States like mine where there is deteriorating lead paint in old homes that threaten so many children. In my hometown of Cleveland and where I grew up in Mansfield and in Appalachia and in city after city and community after community in my State, there are lots of older homes. In the city of Cleveland, well over half the homes are at least 60 years old.

I asked somebody from the Cleveland health department: What percentage of those homes have toxic levels of lead? And he said 99. Understand that old homes in this country—homes that are 60, 70, 80 years old—many homes fall into that category, and they overwhelmingly have toxic levels of lead.

My support for Dr. Carson centers around the fact that he may not know much about housing policy yet—I am hopeful that in the tours he takes, including to my State and the chairman's State of Idaho—I hope and I assume he will learn more about housing, but one thing he does know as a brain surgeon is he knows what lead does to the development of children.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported 70 census tracts in Cuyahoga County where as many as one in three children are poisoned because of the age and the condition of the housing stock. One in three children has her or his physical and emotional and mental development sometimes arrested or slowed because of lead poisoning.

Through the Federal Housing Administration, HUD works with lenders to help creditworthy borrowers access stable mortgage credit so they can purchase a home. FHA played a central countercyclical role in providing mortgage credit following the financial crisis when the private sector largely withdrew from the field, as we remember. It has since receded into its typical share of the housing market. It is still essential, though, for home buyers, including many first-time and minority home buyers. HUD'S role will only become more important as housing communities' development challenges have grown. The need for affordable housing has grown dramatically since the great recession. The demand for units has increased while wages have stagnated.

The market alone is not producing sufficient housing for families and those on fixed incomes. Studies have demonstrated that many people who perform essential work—child care

teachers, school bus drivers, retail workers, people working full time, people working just as hard as the staff in front of me, people working just as hard as people who have titles like mine—simply can't afford the rent in the communities they serve. Half of the people who rent pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing.

One-quarter of all renters—25 percent of all renters, 11 million people in this country—pay more than half of their incomes for rent. If you are paying 51, 52, 55 percent of your income in rent, if one bad thing happens—a sick child, your plant lays you off for 2 weeks, your roof leaks, any number of things can happen. When you are living on the edge, when half of your income is for housing, what happens? You lose your home. You get evicted.

These burdens are more severe at the bottom of the income spectrum among extremely low-income renter households—those with incomes at or below 30 percent of median income, and 75 percent may pay more than half of their income in rent.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition identified a shortage of 7 million affordable and available rental units for the Nation's extremely low-income renter households. We are reaching only one out of four of those eligible families. Many end up on years' long waiting lists for lack of funding.

Government extends a hand to some of these families, but not to nearly enough. That needs to change. Despite the growing need for affordable housing, we risk losing the affordable housing resources we have due to physical deterioration or the end of long-term affordability contracts of property owners.

Families burdened by high housing costs have fewer resources available to meet other needs such as transportation for work and food and medicine. They even face eviction and homelessness; 500,000 people were homeless on any given night in January of 2016—550,000, actually.

The Department of Education data, which includes families doubled up for economic reasons, indicates that 1.4 million school children and their families were homeless at some point during the 2013-2014 school year. Think about that. Some of these kids were exposed to lead and have learning disabilities. Others don't get enough to eat, in spite of the family school breakfast and lunch program, because they don't eat so well on weekends and at night and on summer vacations or whenever. In addition, 1.4 million are homeless.

Matthew Desmond wrote a book called "Evicted." He is a gentleman I have gotten to know a little bit. He lived in Milwaukee, a poor White neighborhood, a poor Black neighborhood. He wrote about people he got to meet and got to know, and he spent enough time where he got to know people. When he signed this book, he wrote: Home equals life. If you don't

have a decent place to live—and I would imagine that none of us in this Chamber has that challenge. When you don't have a place to call home, your life can be upside down. With all of the challenges and all of the things that can happen, when you get evicted, your kids have to move to a new school district. You don't know where you are going to end up. You lose the few possessions you have when you're evicted. This book is recommended reading for anybody who works on housing issues. It is a book called "Evicted" by Matthew Desmond.

One last point: I look forward to working with colleagues in the administration on the President's proposed \$1 trillion investment and infrastructure, including housing. To jump-start the conversation about the President's proposed infrastructure package, my colleagues and I announced a blueprint to rebuild America's infrastructure.

I find it interesting, again, that the assistant majority leader talked about Democrats' intransigence and Democrats' obstruction when the President has put nothing out there on infrastructure, nothing out there on housing, nothing out there about healthcare—repeal and replace—none of those kinds of legislation.

We don't even know what he is talking about, other than saying "\$1 trillion." Democrats acted responsibly and put out our \$1 trillion 10-year plan, hoping the President's \$1 trillion 10-year plan can match up and we can work together. This blueprint talks about ways we invest in American infrastructure to improve the Nation's transportation, water, housing, and community infrastructure and create thousands of good-paying union jobs in construction and manufacturing jobs with strong "Buy American" provisions.

Even though the President in his prior life as a businessman wore suits, sold suits, sold tableware, and sold glassware made overseas, and even though this suit I wear is made by union workers 10 miles from my house, the President, now that he is President—the issue is not his own private business or his family's own private business where they outsource jobs to do production so they make more money. I don't like that, but that is no longer our business. What is our business is that the President steps forward with "Buy American."

"Buy American" means if there is steel in an infrastructure project, it should be made by steelworkers in Youngstown or Lorain, OH, or somewhere in Ohio. If there is iron in these projects, if there is aluminum in these projects, if there is concrete, if there is any kind of product, if taxpayers are paying for it, it should be made by American workers.

Our blueprint is central to HUD's mission. It includes \$100 billion to rebuild Main Street and communities. It includes ideas to address affordable housing challenges, eliminate blighted

properties that bring down local property values, and remediate lead hazards that threaten children. We are ready to work on real infrastructure.

As I said, I am going to vote for Ben Carson for Secretary of HUD. He is not an inspiring choice, but he is someone who is an accomplished man. I count on him to help us address this terrible lead problem. I count on him to stand with us, as he pledged, to address the scourge of lead. I count on him to uphold the Fair Housing Act and the housing rights of LGBTQ individuals. I count on him to advocate for rental assistance and investment and homelessness. I count on him to push to include housing in the President's infrastructure plan. I count on him to fight the President. If the President is going to increase defense by \$50 billion and cut a whole host of housing and urban programs, I count on this nominee. He promised our committee. He said it. He said it in private meetings. He said it in public meetings. We will hold him accountable. I plan to vote yes.

To reiterate, I rise today to speak on the pending nomination of Dr. Benjamin Carson to be the new Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD.

Dr. Carson is not the nominee I would have chosen to lead HUD, due to both his lack of direct experience with the housing and community development fields, and his often troubling public statements prior to his nomination.

Despite my reservations, and my disagreements with some of his positions, I will give Dr. Carson the benefit of the doubt based on commitments he has made to me in person and to the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee in his testimony and written responses.

This includes Dr. Carson's promises to:

Address the scourge of lead hazards that threaten the health and futures of children in Ohio and nationwide; Uphold the Fair Housing Act and the housing rights of LGBTQ individuals; Advocate for rental assistance and investment to end homelessness; And push to include housing in the President's infrastructure plan. Let me be clear: I will do everything in my power to hold Dr. Carson accountable for making good on his promises.

Role of HUD. As the ranking member of the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee responsible for housing policy, I have seen how important the Department is for people in Ohio and across the country.

HUD is charged with enforcing our fair housing laws. It has been an essential partner in our national efforts to prevent and end homelessness for veterans, the chronically homeless, and youth and families.

The Department's primary rental assistance programs help over 4.5 million low-income households of families, the elderly, and people with disabilities find a place to call home.

It assists cities and towns in their efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and invest in communities; and promotes lead-safe, healthy housing for children.

Through the Federal Housing Administration, HUD works with lenders to help creditworthy borrowers access sustainable mortgage credit so they can purchase a home.

The FHA played an essential, countercyclical role in providing mortgage credit following the financial crisis, when the private sector largely withdrew from the field.

It has since receded to its typical share of the housing market, but it is still essential for many homebuyers, including first-time and minority homebuyers.

HUD's role has only become more important as our housing and community development challenges have grown.

The need for affordable housing has grown dramatically since the Great Recession, as demand for rental units has increased and wages have stagnated.

The market alone is not producing sufficient affordable housing for families and those on fixed incomes.

A person with a full-time job would need to earn an hourly wage of \$20.30 in order to afford a modest, two-bedroom rental at HUD's national average fair market rent.

This "housing wage" is far above the minimum wage, income available to people with disabilities who rely upon Supplemental Security Income, or even the median wage earned by renters.

Studies have demonstrated that people performing essential work—like child care teachers, school bus drivers, and retail workers—are often unable to afford rent in the communities they serve.

Half of all renters—over 21 million households—paid more than 30 percent of their incomes towards housing in 2014. And a quarter of all renters—over 11 million—paid more than half their incomes for rent.

These burdens are more severe at the bottom of the income spectrum. Among extremely low income renter households—those with incomes at or below 30 percent of area median income, 75 percent pay more than half their incomes on rent.

In 2016, the National Low Income Housing Coalition identified a shortage of 7.2 million affordable and available rental units for the nation's ELI renter households.

We are reaching only one out of four eligible families. Many end up on years-long waiting lists for lack of funding.

Despite the growing need for affordable housing, we risk losing the affordable housing resources we have due to physical deterioration or the end of long-term affordability contracts with property owners.

Public housing alone needs an estimated \$26 billion in major repairs. HUD estimates that we are losing 10,000 units of public housing every year due to physical obsolescence.

According to Harvard's Joint Center on Housing Studies, nearly 2.2 million units of HUD-assisted and low income housing tax credit-supported housing will reach the end of their affordability periods by 2025. Families burdened by high housing costs have fewer resources available to meet other needs like transportation to work, food, and medicine, and they may even face eviction and homelessness.

Nearly 550,000 people were homeless on a given night in January 2016. Department of Education data, which include families doubled up for economic reasons, indicate that nearly 1.4 million school-age children and their families were homeless at some point during the 2013–2014 school year.

The hardships stemming from evictions and homelessness make it harder for families to climb the economic ladder.

As Matthew Desmond, author of *Evicted*, points out: "Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty."

Trump Urban Renewal Plan. Throughout his campaign, President-elect Trump promised to rebuild America's "inner cities," which he labeled "hell holes."

Mr. Trump spelled out his views in his, quote, "New Deal for Black America, With a Plan for Urban Renewal."

The plan covers issues such as school choice, investing in law enforcement, tax reform, trade, and infrastructure investment.

At a time when more than 11 million families are paying more than half their income toward rent, and half a million people have no place to call home, the President-elect's plan does not mention this housing crisis.

In addition, cities, like Black Americans, are not monolithic.

In recent years, many cities have seen a wave of population growth and investment that have led to greater economic activity, tighter rental housing markets, and rising rental housing costs.

As a result, many lower-income families and businesses who endured challenging decades in their communities are finding themselves priced out of their long-time neighborhoods just when additional economic opportunities are opening up.

Loss of housing in urban neighborhoods can push residents away from access to jobs, transit, and local support networks such as hospitals and child care.

In many of these neighborhoods, federally-assisted housing may be coming to the end of long-term affordability contracts or at risk of loss due to physical deterioration and HUD will be called on to help low-income people access the opportunity that has finally come to their neighborhoods.

HUD will need to respond to a diverse set of challenges across the country.

Dr. Ben Carson is a distinguished pediatric neurosurgeon. His remarkable life story is well known to all of us,

and to millions of Americans beyond this room. He is an inspiration and a testament to the American dream.

Dr. Carson's experience, while impressive, does not automatically qualify him to lead HUD.

In reviewing Dr. Carson's nomination, I had the opportunity to question him extensively about his plans as Secretary. His answers were responsive, in contrast to many of President Trump's nominees.

Dr. Carson committed to: Address the scourge of lead paint hazards that threaten the future of too many of Ohio's children; Uphold the Fair Housing Act and housing rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals; Advocate for rental assistance and investment to end homelessness; and Push to include housing in the President's infrastructure plan.

Some of Trump's appointees have taken positions antithetical to the agencies for which they would be responsible. In his testimony, Dr. Carson did not seem to be in this camp.

At that hearing, Carson stated that he plans to go on a listening tour across the country and at HUD to learn what is working and what is not. And he promised to surround himself with pragmatic, bipartisan, senior advisers.

He said: "I will surround myself with people who have a passion for improving the agency, not breaking down its programs."

In many cases, Dr. Carson moderated or reversed controversial positions he had taken previously.

I will discuss a few of the commitments Dr. Carson made during our committee process.

Lead Paint Poisoning. Dr. Carson promised to work to end the scourge of lead poisoning that threatens the health and futures of too many children in Ohio and across the country.

There is a growing realization that safe, affordable housing is a platform for good health.

Whether that is healthy housing that protects kids from lead and asthma-inducing mold, accessible units that help seniors safely age in place and avoid expensive institutional care, or housing that enables people with disabilities to live in the community.

As Dr. Carson said in his written statement: "There is a strong connection between housing and health . . . Housing (and housing discrimination) is a 'social determinant' of health . . . These problems occur across America—in cities as well as suburbs and rural areas . . . We cannot have social mobility without a strong healthy foundation in the home."

When Dr. Carson and I met privately, we discussed the tragic effects of lead in Ohio and nationwide. He knows—from a medical perspective—the terrible price that children and society pay for the legacy of lead in water, industrial settings, and, all-too-often, deteriorating paint in their homes.

While we have rightly focused on lead in water in Flint, MI, and Sebring, OH,

the most prevalent source of childhood lead poisoning is lead-based paint in homes built before the federal government stepped in to prohibit its use in 1978.

Approximately 23 million older homes have significant lead paint hazards, 3.6 million of which house children under six who are most susceptible to the effects of lead paint poisoning. This is a great challenge in states like mine that have a lot of older homes.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported that that there are nearly 70 census tracts in Cuyahoga County, where I live, where as many as 1 in 3 children are likely poisoned because of the age and condition of the housing stock.

This is a tragedy not just for these kids and families, but for society. We all absorb the increased costs of medical care, education, criminal justice, and lost economic potential that stem from childhood lead poisoning.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Dr. Carson to address the avoidable tragedy of childhood lead paint poisoning.

Fair Housing. Dr. Carson pledged to uphold the nation's fair housing laws, which includes the requirement that HUD's grantees affirmatively further fair housing.

At the hearing, Dr. Carson was clear about his support for the Fair Housing Act, stating:

I think the Fair Housing [Act] in 1968 was one of the best pieces of legislation we had. It was modified 1988. LBJ said no one could possibly question this, I agree with him.

I asked Dr. Carson about a 2015 Washington Times Op-Ed in which he objected to HUD's rule implementing the Fair Housing Act's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing provision, likening it to a failed socialist experiment.

The rule, which implements a requirement of the Fair Housing Act, was adopted after a two-year public comment period and responds to GAO criticism of HUD's previous guidance in this area.

Carson stated that his op-ed had been "distorted by many people." He went on to say that he has no problem with "affirmative action or . . . integration" but that he does have a problem with people dictating policy when they don't know the area when we have "local HUD officials . . . who can assess what the problems are in their area and, working with local officials, can come up with better solutions."

The fair housing rule is such a locally driven conversation, because it requires HUD grantees to analyze their own situations and develop locally driven plans to address their fair housing challenges.

Finally, Dr. Carson stated in writing that he would enforce the Fair Housing Act and support HUD's 2015 rule.

If Dr. Carson were to reverse the fair housing rule, it would violate his commitments at the hearing and in writing.

LGBTQ Housing Rights. During the Committee's process, I sought information on Dr. Carson's views of the housing rights of LGBTQ individuals.

In the past, Dr. Carson has made troubling comments about LGBTQ people that raised questions about whether LGBTQ people should enjoy the same rights as everyone else.

Dr. Carson's views in this area are important because the HUD Secretary oversees the housing rights of all Americans, including LGBTQ people. LGBTQ people face housing discrimination, bullying, and an alarmingly high incidence of youth homelessness.

In his written statement, Dr. Carson clearly stated that he wants to improve the lives of all families and communities "no matter their race, creed, color, or orientation."

In light of his previous statements, my colleague and I asked further questions.

I asked Dr. Carson whether he believes that HUD has a duty to take actions that promote equal access to housing opportunities for LGBTQ people. In response, he stated that he believes that "all Americans . . . should be protected by the law," but went on to say that no one gets "extra rights."

To clarify his meaning, I asked whether he could think of any instances where protecting equal access to housing opportunities for LGBTQ people would mean providing them "extra rights."

His response was "I cannot."

I also asked whether he believes that HUD provides "extra rights" to LGBTQ people that need to be withdrawn.

His response was "I do not."

In other statements, Dr. Carson also clearly pledged to protect the LGBTQ community from discrimination and to continue to support and enforce HUD's equal access rules.

These rules ensure that all individuals have equal access to the Department's programs "without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or marital status" and in accordance with their gender identity.

If Dr. Carson is confirmed, any actions that he or the agency take to discriminate against or limit the housing rights of LGBTQ individuals and families would be contrary to his statements to me and the Committee.

Rental Assistance. Dr. Carson promised to be an advocate for HUD rental assistance.

During the hearing, Dr. Carson backed away from his previous position calling for 10 percent across-the-board cuts to Federal programs as a budget-cutting measure.

At our hearing, Dr. Carson noted that he had revised his position to 1 percent across-the-board cuts as a way to achieve budget savings. While I do not subscribe to this policy, it shows moderation of Dr. Carson's previous position.

With respect to HUD programs, he recognized the value of HUD rental as-

sistance programs in meeting the needs of the lowest income individuals, stating:

When it comes to deep affordability, though, removing all regulatory barriers won't get you there. It comes down to subsidy. . . . I think we can all agree that we will all make sure housing is a key consideration in every appropriations bill . . . If confirmed I will be a vocal advocate internally for funding, but prioritization will continue to occur in this Administration as it did in the last.

Dr. Carson also recognized the value of the important safety net provided by HUD programs, stating that "the rental assistance program is essential" and that "safety net programs are important. I would never . . . advocate abolishing them without having an alternative route for people to follow."

Ending Homelessness. In 2010, Opening Doors, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, set out goals to end homelessness for veterans, the chronically homeless, families, children, and youth and all other homelessness.

Through a combination of bipartisan federal investments in appropriate housing solutions particularly permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless and HUD-VASH vouchers for veterans and improved practices at the federal and local levels, we have made real progress toward these goals. Since 2010, such investments have helped reduce chronic homelessness by 27 percent and veterans' homelessness by 47 percent.

Yet, more remains to be done.

According to HUD's "2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report" to Congress, approximately 549,928 people were homeless on a given night in January 2016. Nearly 195,000 of the homeless on this night were in families including at least one child.

Stating that "No one can argue with the goal of ending homelessness," Dr. Carson said he intends to build on the progress we have made toward ending homelessness. He also said he will "call for continued investment to end homelessness for veterans, the chronically homeless, and children and families."

Dr. Carson also praised the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, which coordinates Federal efforts to efficiently and effectively combat homelessness and helps facilitate local communities' coordinated efforts.

Housing and Infrastructure. The President's promised \$1 trillion investment in infrastructure is one of the pillars of the President's Plan for Urban Renewal. This is an area where I have said I would like to work with the new administration.

Our grandparents built an infrastructure for us that was the envy of the world and became the foundation of our economy for years to come. But after decades of neglect, we need to re-invest.

My colleagues in the Democratic caucus and I are taking the President up on his call for a \$1 trillion investment in American infrastructure.

To jump-start the conversation about the President's promise, we announced "A Blueprint to Rebuild America's Infrastructure."

This blueprint talks about ways we can invest in American infrastructure to improve the Nation's transportation, water, housing, and community infrastructure while creating thousands of construction and manufacturing jobs in Ohio and across the country.

Our blueprint includes \$100 billion to rebuild our main streets and communities, which is central to HUD's mission.

This includes ideas to address affordable housing challenges, eliminate the blighted properties that bring down local property values in neighborhoods, and remediate lead hazards that can set children back for life and increase public costs.

We need to invest in the infrastructure of our communities.

I've talked about the need to address lead-based paint to prevent childhood lead poisoning.

In communities across Ohio and the country, blighted properties are holding our neighborhoods back. They reduce neighbors' property values, reduce tax base necessary to support public services, and create crime and safety threats.

A 2015 report from Policy Matters Ohio estimated Ohio alone would need \$750 million to address the State's residential demolition needs.

Our public housing alone needs an estimated \$26 billion in repairs.

When we met, Dr. Carson said that he is supportive of investing in our public housing infrastructure.

In questions following the hearing, I asked Dr. Carson whether he would work with the President to ensure that there is a real infrastructure package to address the needs of our urban and rural communities and that it includes funding for preserving and creating affordable housing.

In response, Dr. Carson responded by saying, "I will absolutely commit to advocating for the inclusion of housing in the President Elect's infrastructure package."

I look forward to working with Dr. Carson to ensure that the administration supports these job-creating investments in our housing and other infrastructure.

Support Despite Reservations. As I stated at the outset, Dr. Carson is not the nominee that I would have chosen to lead HUD.

I do not agree with all of his positions.

For example, Dr. Carson wants to help people increase their incomes so that they can become self-sufficient. I also believe we should do everything we can to help families escape poverty and find good, middle-class jobs that can sustain a family.

However, Dr. Carson seems to believe that this can be done without raising the minimum wage and without the

Labor Department's overtime rule that would help 100,000 workers in my state get the pay they deserve. He believes incomes will rise just by creating the right "environment."

I believe that the Federal Government should stand on the side of workers rather than advancing a billionaire agenda.

But despite my reservations and my disagreements with some of his positions, I am voting to confirm him, based on the commitments he made to the committee that I discussed here today.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition, or NLIHC, is a leading national organization advocating for safe, affordable housing for low-income people, including the residents of HUD-assisted housing.

NLIHC recently circulated a statement that reads:

Despite our initial concerns about Carson's lack of experience with and knowledge of the HUD programs that he would oversee, NLIHC does not oppose his nomination:

As demonstrated in his Senate confirmation hearing, Carson has clearly taken the time to begin to understand and come to appreciate the importance of HUD's programs.

Once confirmed, NLIHC is committed to working with Dr. Carson to ensure that the lowest income people in America have decent, affordable and accessible homes.

In the coming years, I will do everything in my power to hold him to his promises and to advocate for HUD's important work.

I Hope the Administration Helps Him Succeed. Even if Dr. Carson and I shared the exact same views, I would be concerned about what the next few years bodes for HUD and our communities.

On January 23, the Trump administration adopted a hiring freeze and called for a reduction in the Federal workforce.

HUD already experienced the greatest percentage drop in career employees across the government from 2005 through 2014, and now HUD faces the highest percentage career employees eligible to retire by 2019.

According to HUD's FY 2017 budget justifications, "This retirement wave can cause a loss of leadership and institutional knowledge at all levels."

Such a loss could also cause a failure to ensure that the Department is upholding its duties to taxpayers by ensuring the quality of federally-assisted housing, fair housing enforcement, and overseeing FHA lending programs, for examples.

Dr. Carson says he wants to learn from and be on the side of HUD's career staff. Let's hope the administration gives him sufficient staffing to accomplish his mission.

I am also very concerned about HUD's budget going forward.

The Senate recently confirmed Mick Mulvaney, an ideologue who threatened to default on our debt and wants to gut our retirement safety net, to lead the President's Office of Management and Budget.

There have been reports that the administration has been considering using Heritage Foundation budget blueprints as the basis for its budget proposals.

Heritage has proposed budget outlines that would literally zero out the HUD rental assistance programs and the Community Development Block Grant Program.

We are also hearing reports that the Trump administration is making plans to cut nondefense discretionary programs by \$54 billion in fiscal year 2018—about a 10 percent cut—in order to fund increased defense spending.

This cut would come on top of the sequestration-related cuts to nondefense discretionary, or NDD, programs that will kick in in FY 2018 if we don't do something to stop them.

NDD programs at HUD have already absorbed cuts. Since 2010, funding for public housing has fallen 21 percent, while funding for the HOME program has fallen by more than 50 percent.

Sequestration cuts in FY 2013 reduced the number of housing vouchers by more than 80,000. In recent years, Congress and local agencies have been able to restore many of these lost vouchers, but further cutbacks will reverse this trend.

At a time when our families are facing growing affordable housing needs, the administration may be considering cuts that would devastate our housing safety net and leave families, seniors, formerly homeless veterans, and communities reeling.

All of this is coming at the same time that they are repealing the ACA and working to repeal rules that protect workers, consumers, and retirees.

At our hearing, Dr. Carson himself walked away from previous comments he had made in support of 10 percent across-the-board cuts.

At the nomination hearing, Dr. Carson stated:

I want to advocate for the HUD budget. . . . In the process of doing a listening tour and in talking to the people who were there already I want to put together a world-class plan on housing in this country and then I want to come to you with that world-class plan and I want to convince you all that this is what we need to do.

I hope that the administration and those setting budget priorities here in Congress will give Dr. Carson and HUD the tools they need to fulfill their mission.

If not, I hope my colleagues and citizens across the country will work with me to ensure that we have a housing and community development policy that meets the needs of all Americans.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONGRATULATING THE STATE OF NEBRASKA ON THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADMISSION OF THAT STATE INTO THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise to recognize a pivotal moment in our Nation's history. On this day, 150 years ago, the Territory of Nebraska became the 37th State to enter the Union.

Let me tell you the story of Nebraska. In a deep and powerful way, it is the story of America. America grew up in Nebraska. We were the first State admitted after the Civil War, but our admission was first vetoed by President Andrew Johnson. It was the only time in American history that this had happened. The reason? President Johnson disagreed with a fundamental condition of Nebraska's statehood—that Black men be allowed to vote.

Fortunately, Congress overrode this veto, and on March 1, 1867, Nebraska became a State. I said before that Nebraska's statehood was a pivotal moment for our country. Nebraska gave America a chance to be better.

By bringing Nebraska into the Union, our country turned away from slavery forever. We turned toward the truth about humankind—that everyone is precious in Heaven's eyes. By making Nebraska a State, America reached for a future more closely aligned with that truth.

Since that new birth of freedom, our Nation has taken many more steps—some bold strides, some stumbles—but always we seek to be more fully the country we were made to be. At a crucial moment, Nebraska strengthened our commitment to do that. Nebraska renewed America's identity.

As a State, Nebraska had not only hard but also humble beginnings. They called it the Great American Desert. In the early 1800s, the famous military officer and explorer Zebulon Pike shrugged us off, saying simply: "Not a stick of timber." A few years later, geologist Edwin James and MAJ Steven Long gave us this review: "The land was uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture."

Today, wagon ruts can still be seen on Windlass Hill on the Oregon-California Trail, where settlers passed through. They were looking for greener pastures.

Well, last year Nebraska ranked No. 1 in the Nation in beef exports. The State ranked No. 1 in both the number of mother cows and cattle on feed. We are the beef State. We are Corn Huskers. With both corn and cattle, we produce high quality protein products that are sought by consumers all around this globe. We are No. 1 in the Nation in great northern bean production, popcorn production, and irrigated acres of cropland. Nebraska agriculture is diverse and it is expansive.

We also have more miles of river than any other State. As we sit over the great High Plains in the Ogallala Aquifer, water flows to seven other States from Nebraska. Our abundant

supply of groundwater makes us leaders in producing soybeans, wheat, pork, and grain sorghum.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act. It made Americans really a simple offer: Strike out west, cultivate 160 acres of surveyed government land for 5 years, and at the end of that time, the land would be theirs. Families crossed the plains in covered wagons to take Mr. Lincoln up on that offer, and this time they stayed. In fact, the law's very first claimant was a doctor and a Civil War veteran named, fittingly enough, Daniel Freeman. So powerful was his dream that Dr. Freeman filed his paperwork just a few minutes after midnight on New Year's Day, 1863, the day that law went into effect. His homestead lies just outside of Beatrice, NE, where today we find the Homestead National Monument of America. In this vast and ruthless land, the homesteaders made the American dream real. They tilled the earth, first to feed themselves and then to feed the world.

Nebraskans made the Great American Desert into one of the greatest agricultural exporting regions in world history. They did this in part by scientific discovery. Developments in agricultural technology, including the center pivot, pioneered in Nebraska, have allowed Nebraska ag producers to lead the Nation in center pivot irrigation technology, and today we are home to the four largest irrigation companies in the United States.

Other technological breakthroughs came in transportation, especially rail. These developments helped us to connect our communities and our country. The route of the First Transcontinental Railroad runs through my State. Today, Bailey Yard in North Platte is the world's largest railroad classification yard. In addition, Nebraska now connects her families by 97,000 miles of public roads. Well, that is a far cry from those wagon ruts. These improvements allow us to continue that noble work which we gladly accept of feeding the world.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on something. Nebraska not only helped America find its moral compass again, but our State also shows what wonders a free and virtuous people may work, and it reveals the relationship between the two. When you seek the right thing first and you work at it hard, amazing things follow. This is true not only in our rural areas but also in our cities.

Omaha began as the "Gateway to the West." Pioneers and immigrants made it a mighty city in its own right. From the former stockyards to the strong family businesses and Fortune 500 companies that you will find there today, the fingerprints of hardworking, dedicated people cover every inch of concrete.

Omaha leads in banking, insurance, telecommunications, transportation,

and in medicine. Last year, the University of Nebraska Medical Center was ranked fifth in America among the best medical schools for primary care. I think Dr. Daniel Freeman, America's first homesteader, would be proud of that, but I doubt if he would be surprised. This is what happens when we work hard and let ourselves be guided by goodness.

It happened in Lincoln, our State capital, which was renamed after President Lincoln was assassinated. It happens in our Nebraska Panhandle towns and in our cities along the broad and braided Platte River, all along our I-80 corridor, and in so many rural small towns across our State. Nebraskans are a people who are engaged in manufacturing, technology, ag business, education, and the arts. We are strong people, and we build strong communities.

I have to say another word about doing the right thing. In 1879, Nebraska was the site of the first time that American Indians had their day in court, when Standing Bear made his famous statement: "I am a Man." The U.S. district court eventually ruled what we all know to be absolute truth—that a person is a person. Here again, Nebraska gave America the opportunity to be better. There are many other moments.

Nebraska was the first State in which women were the two major party candidates for Governor, when Kay Orr, a Republican, defeated Helen Bosalis, a Democrat, in 1986.

I am on the Senate floor honoring the State I love on its 150th anniversary. I encourage you to come and see what the good life is about. See our cities—their industry, their creativity, their culture—where our innovators work new wonders, so much so that we are now called Silicon Prairie. Feel the thrill of Memorial Stadium, which becomes our third largest city on a game day. Shout "Go Big Red" and cheer on the Huskers. Delight in our opera and ballet. Breathe in our small towns. Stop in at a family-run bakery. Have lunch at a local cafe. Enjoy some of the national food sensations that began in Nebraska: Kool-Aid, our Reuben sandwich, and, of course, runzas.

Enjoy local favorites, like kolache, kuchen, fried tacos, and pork chili. Enjoy a Nebraska rodeo. Ride out to our rural areas, where, as Poet Laureate Ted Kooser says, the "pickup kicks its fenders off and settles back to read the clouds." Be awed by the vastness of Nebraska, which gives us perspective on things great and small. Learn from Chimney Rock, our western buttes, and the Pine Ridge, how to stand tall no matter the weather or the season of life. Be soothed by the Sandhills—the largest grass-covered sand dunes in the world and God's own cattle country. Find peace in the song of the Sandhills cranes. Take in the Central Flyway, where millions of migratory birds fly, including our State bird—the western meadowlark. See our gently rolling eastern hills. Canoe our