

Trump names opponent of public housing to run Housing and Urban Development

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President-elect Donald Trump's appointment of Ben Carson to head the cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) underscores the extreme right-wing character of the incoming administration.

Carson, the 65-year-old retired neurosurgeon who made a name for himself with his right-wing attacks on the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), which he absurdly compared to chattel slavery, was briefly in the running for the Republican presidential nomination earlier this year. He dropped out last March and endorsed Trump, who has now rewarded him with the cabinet appointment.

The naming of Carson continues Trump's pattern of selecting top-level appointees whose major qualifications are their hostility to the social programs they are charged with overseeing. Betsy de Vos, who was nominated to head the Department of Education, is the wife of the billionaire owner of the Amway Corporation and has worked for more than 30 years to destroy public education by replacing it with a voucher system. Tom Price, the Georgia Congressman named to head the Department of Health and Human Services, is a fanatical advocate of the privatization of Medicare and Medicaid.

Carson, Trump's first African-American cabinet appointment, has advanced as his main qualification the fact that he grew up in impoverished circumstances in Detroit. Carson argues that his own career, including 30 years as the head of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, demonstrates that, as he paraphrased his mother in his autobiography, "if you don't succeed, you have only yourself to blame."

The housing nominee is a vitriolic opponent of all government programs to provide affordable housing,

alleviate poverty or combat de facto racial segregation. "These government-engineered attempts to legislate racial equality create consequences that often make matters worse," he wrote in 2015. As for the growing crisis of poverty and its consequences, he said during his campaign for the presidential nomination that "[W]e the people have the responsibility to take care of the indigent in our society. It's not the government's job."

The nominee also earned a reputation for Islamophobia during the presidential campaign. As summed up by Huffington Post, Carson "thinks Islam isn't a religion and has argued that there's a covert Muslim plot to destroy the US from within." A spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations issued a statement declaring, "Based on his past Islamophobic statements and policy positions, all American should be very concerned on how Dr. Carson would treat Muslim HUD employees or Muslims seeking agency services."

HUD was established as a Cabinet department in 1965, as part of Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." No sooner had it come into being, however, than it became increasingly starved for funds and political support, the victim of the growing economic crisis and its especially severe impact on the older industrial centers of the US. Programs for affordable housing were sharply cut back beginning in the 1970s. Many public housing projects were left to decay, and today the New York City Housing Authority, the biggest and supposedly the most "successful" of public housing departments, faces a capital repairs backlog of nearly \$20 billion.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has an annual budget of \$47 billion and about 8,000 employees. In a country of 320 million, with several

million homeless or one step away from homelessness, where more than one-quarter of the population spends 50 percent or more of their income on housing costs, HUD does not begin to meet basic needs. Much of its operations focus on Section 8 voucher programs, which provide rental assistance to about 4.8 million households. It also provides some mortgage assistance.

The construction of federally-backed affordable housing has slowed to a trickle in recent decades. Today the focus of the private construction industry is on luxury units in gentrifying neighborhoods of cities like New York, Boston, San Francisco and elsewhere, while millions struggle to keep a roof over their heads. This is the “free market,” which will supposedly solve the problems of inadequate and unaffordable housing.

The nomination of Carson likely means the scrapping of anti-discrimination policies established as far back as the 1960s and 1970s. Particular attention has been called to the “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Final Rule,” a legal requirement announced in 2015. According to a report in the *New York Times* this week, it “provides … communities with detailed data on factors like racial demographics, poverty rates, school quality and housing voucher use to help them determine whether lower-income and minority families are isolated from good schools or segregated from opportunity.” These communities are then required “to draft plans to reduce segregation where it exists.”

Data and studies to come up with conclusions that are obvious from the beginning will do nothing about the lack of decent-paying jobs and the necessary funding to provide affordable housing for all. Here, as in every sphere of social life, the choice presented to the working class is between the false promises of the Democrats and the unrestrained austerity and ruthlessness of the Republicans.

While Carson’s nomination is clearly a warning and an escalation of the attack on social rights, the Democrats likewise represent Wall Street and differ only tactically on the tempo of attacks on the working class. This was clearly revealed in the reaction of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to Carson’s appointment. De Blasio, who postured as the most militant opponent of Trump following Election Day, told a press conference this week that he would work together with the arch-reactionary at HUD. “Because

he doesn’t have a formal background in housing issues, it will be important for him to see what the reality is for our people,” the mayor said, as reported on the DNAInfo web site. “I’ll take him on a tour of our public housing and show him how important our affordable housing programs are. And I hope we can work well together.”



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