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Opinion

Trump's Budget Blueprint Cuts Close to Home

From youth yearning for the time to have their own place, to older Americans hoping to age in place, the need to have a home is a shared concern of consumers of all ages and locales. It's where children are raised and memorable moments dwell. It's also where many people rest, reflect, and shut out the worries of the day.

Right now, the future of our country's commitment to housing is in jeopardy. In the recently-released White House Budget Blueprint, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will not resemble its former self. While some programs are proposed to become smaller, others are identified for extinction. Fortunately, while the President proposes a budget, Congress must hold hearings that offer opportunities to amend what some would deem indefensible.

The irony is that so many HUD programs and services that have enjoyed longstanding, broad and bi-partisan support across the country are among those proposed to end.

For example, since 1974, HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program has provided local and state officials the flexibility to fund local priorities for ser-

Charlene
CrowellNNPA
Columnist

vices, projects and partnerships. Whether the need was affordable housing, blight removal, community supportive services or a way to leverage capital in redevelopment projects, local concerns have guided how to make the best

“The future of our country's commitment to housing is in jeopardy

use of federal funds.

According to the White House Budget Blueprint, CDBG would absorb \$3 billion of HUD's proposed \$6.2 billion agency cut. Reactions from municipal leaders and organizations were swift.

“From CDBG block grants, to Community-Oriented Policing Services, the programs targeted for cuts provide support for millions of working Americans and help cities invest in public-good projects like police stations, food banks and domestic violence shelters,” said Matt Zone, a Cleveland city councilmember and president of the Na-

tional League of Cities (NCL), an organization that advocates for 19,000 cities, towns, and villages. “These unprecedented cuts would be devastating to all our nation's cities—with the worst impacts felt in small towns and rural communities.”

Yana Miles, a policy counsel with the Center for Responsible Lending noted that, “In housing, the proposed budget would end some of HUD's most successful programs that help underserved communities including: Com-

munity Development Block Grants, the HOME Investment Partnerships, and Choice Neighborhoods.”

Two of the HUD programs that Miles cites are the focus of another proposed \$1.1 billion in cuts: Choice Neighborhoods and the HOME Investment partnerships program.

The Choice Neighborhoods program provides funding and technical assistance to support local community efforts to improve struggling neighborhoods dotted with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing. Like CDBG, eligibility is formula-based and requires a formal revital-

ization strategy or Transformational Plan.

This past December, HUD announced that from 34 competitive applications, five cities were selected to receive grants totaling \$132 million: Boston, Camden, Denver, Louisville, and St. Louis.

An estimated 1,853 units of severely distressed public housing will be replaced by nearly 3,700 new, mixed-income, mixed-use housing units as part of an overall effort to revitalize neighborhoods

For every \$1 in Choice Neighborhoods funding, awardees and their partners typically leverage for their projects an additional \$5 in public and private funding. Together, the five cities are expected to leverage \$636 million through other public/private sources and expect to stimulate another \$3.3 billion indirectly to magnify their impact.

The HOME Investment Partnerships program focuses exclusively on creating affordable housing opportunities for low-income families. Until now, it has also been the single largest block grant dedicated to expanding this housing sector.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

CBC Opposes Gorsuch Nomination and the Senate Should Too

On January 31, President Trump nominated Judge Neil Gorsuch for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. If confirmed, Gorsuch's lifelong appointment to the court would have serious consequences for all Americans, but especially African Americans and vulnerable communities. Judge Gorsuch has displayed hostility to the rights of minorities, women, people with disabilities, and workers, which is why the Congressional Black Caucus submitted testimony recently opposing his nomination. His judicial record on race and related matters and constitutional and equal rights litigation does not merit our support or the support of the Senate.

All interpreters of the law should be committed to fairness and justice, not a specific legal philosophy of judicial interpretation. Judge Gorsuch's commitment to “originalism,” or, interpreting the Constitution in a way that's consistent with the intent of those who wrote it, often results in him ruling in favor of the big guy instead of the little guy, the strong instead of the weak, and the majority instead of minorities. From 2007 to 2016, Judge Gorsuch issued 14 published judgments related to employee

Rep. Cedric
Richmond
(D-La.)Chairman,
CBC

discrimination cases. Nine of those decisions were in favor of the employer. We need a Supreme Court justice who will judge cases on the merits, not based on his or her per-

“Americans need a Supreme Court justice who will judge cases on the merits, not based on his or her personal philosophies

sonal philosophies.

For example, Judge Gorsuch believes that police officers should be granted qualified immunity, which prevents law enforcement and other government officials from being held accountable for the excessive use of force. In the case of *Wilson v. City of Lafayette*, Gorsuch decided that a police officer was entitled to qualified immunity from an excessive force claim arising from the use of a stun gun that ultimately killed a young man. In three other cases involving police accountability, Gorsuch ruled in favor of police searches of vehicles with-

out a warrant, minimizing the Fourth Amendment protections against unauthorized search and seizure.

Judge Gorsuch's ruling in police accountability cases are particularly troubling given the increasing number of shooting deaths of so many unarmed African Americans by the police, and recent Department of Justice investigations that have found that police departments across the country have had a “pattern

and practice” of racial discrimination.

In addition to his poor judicial record on police accountability, Judge Gorsuch has a poor judicial record on workers' rights.

His record is one of supporting employers over employees, even in the case of employees with disabilities. In *Hwang v. Kansas State University*, Judge Gorsuch ruled that “showing up” for work is an essential job function and that the Rehabilitation Act should not be used as a safety net for employees who cannot work. This case focused on a professor employed by Kan-

sas State University who was diagnosed with cancer, and, after treatments that weakened her immune system, requested an extension due to a flu outbreak on the campus. Judge Gorsuch denied her request and sided with the university, compromising her health and recovery.

Because of the decisions rendered by the Supreme Court, African Americans have been granted the opportunity to attend the school of their choice, women have been granted reproductive health rights, and workers have been granted safety and security from exploitative labor practices. Judge Gorsuch's record in each of these areas raises concerns.

His commitment to “originalism” also raises concerns. The Constitution is a living and breathing document that is meant to evolve with our society and it should be interpreted as such.

As the Senate evaluates Judge Gorsuch's judicial record, it is imperative that Senators focus on consistency. Judge Gorsuch has consistently used the bench to protect corporations, and limit the rights of minorities, women, and workers. Consequently, the Congressional Black Caucus opposes his nomination and urges the Senate to also.