



**MEMBERS OF CONGRESS QUESTION BUDGET'S SELF-HELP FUNDING, MINIMUM RENTS, AND MORE.** Appropriations Committee Chair Hal Rogers (R-KY) called the proposed reduction in funding for Section 523 self-help housing “troublesome” at a

March 18 House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on the Administration’s FY16 budget request. Housing Administrator Tony Hernandez said carryover from FY15 will help fund self-help contracts, and that RD’s effort to improve underwriting and automation will lead to reduced wait times for loan approvals. Subcommittee Chair Robert Aderholt (R-AL) questioned funding decreases that have “been rejected [by Congress] many times in the past,” and also asked about the proposed \$50 minimum rent. Hernandez said about 36,000 households would be eligible for hardship exemptions, where a rent of \$25 would likely be required, and noted USDA is asking to access HHS income verification databases to confirm program eligibility. Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD) inquired about RD’s reevaluation of how “rural in character” is defined to determine housing program eligibility. Hernandez replied the requirement is currently suspended and should be reinstated by September 2015. Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) pointed out this was the only hearing addressing rural poverty.

**CASTRO INCLUDES RURAL IN BUDGET TESTIMONY.** On March 11, HUD Secretary Julián Castro testified on HUD’s FY16 budget request before the Senate Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee. His written testimony, like the testimony prepared for the House Subcommittee on February 25, includes a section on rural America, focusing on Native American programs, colonias, and partnerships with USDA.

**HOUSE AND SENATE REPUBLICANS RELEASE FY16 BUDGETS.** Neither document includes specific spending levels for individual housing programs. The Senate Republicans’ budget proposal does not discuss housing. The House version says it will reform housing programs, without details except for positive mention of HUD’s Moving to Work program. It would also privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

**VA EXPANDS ELIGIBILITY FOR SSVF NOFA.** The Department of Veterans Affairs has made current Supportive Services for Veteran Families grantees with three-year, non-renewable grants eligible to apply under its February 3 NOFA (see HAC News, 2/4/15). The deadline is April 10. Contact SSVF staff, 877-737-0111.

**HUD REQUESTS INPUT ON HOPWA FOR ABUSE VICTIMS.** Comments are due April 13 on a demonstration that will award grants to states, local governments, and nonprofits to provide temporary housing to low-income victims of abuse or assault living with HIV/AIDS. Grantees must coordinate with local domestic violence and sexual assault service providers for client outreach and supportive services. Contact Amy Palilonis, HUD, 202-402-5916.

**USDA STRIKEFORCE INITIATIVE ADDS COUNTIES IN OKLAHOMA AND PUERTO RICO.** StrikeForce targets assistance to rural areas with chronic poverty. Parts of 21 states and the entire island of Puerto Rico are now included.

**COMMENTS REQUESTED ON REDUCING USDA REGULATORY BURDENS.** Comments are due May 18 on ways to modify regulations to streamline reporting and increase flexibility. Contact Michael Poe, USDA, 202-720-3257.

**GAP BETWEEN SUPPLY OF AND DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE RENTAL UNITS CONTINUES TO GROW.** Affordable Housing is Nowhere to be Found for Millions, published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, highlights the gaps at the national and state levels. Nationwide, only 31 affordable and available rental units exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. NLIHC says that, without government intervention, this gap will continue increasing.

**HOUSING COSTS INCREASING FOR EMPLOYED RENTERS.** Housing Landscape 2015, by the National Housing Conference’s Center for Housing Policy, reports housing affordability has improved slightly for low- and moderate-income working households, but costs continue to increase for working renters. Minority-headed households – except for American Indians and Native Alaskans – have a notably higher housing cost burden than white-headed households.

**HAC RELEASES CONFERENCE REPORT.** Events from the 2014 HAC Rural Housing Conference are

reviewed briefly in the final report, which includes links to videos of each plenary session as well as materials from select workshops.

**HAC SETS “SERVING VETERANS IN RURAL AMERICA” CONFERENCE FOR MAY 20.**

Cosponsored by HAC and The Home Depot Foundation, this event in Washington, DC will provide information on housing, health, and employment needs and programs for rural veterans, with a special focus on successful local projects. Confirmed speakers include Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), other government officials, and representatives of several local rural housing organizations. There is no charge, but registration is requested. To register or for more information, email [janice@ruralhome.org](mailto:janice@ruralhome.org).

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