

TO BE EQUAL

Housing inadequate

U.S. urban growth agency proposed



By Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

If there's one thing that's obvious about the housing situation it is that the demand for housing that low and middle income people can afford will not be met unless there are some drastic departures from past policies.

Some 60 per cent of all Americans are unable to afford the price of a new home, and conditions seem bound to get worse, not better.

When you deduct the numbers of sound housing units lost each year through abandonment, which is an increasing problem in many cities, and through urban renewal projects, highway construction and other reasons, there is probably a net loss of available housing units. The half-million subsidized units built per year then, don't even balance the numbers of houses and apartments lost, much less add to the supply of needed housing.

When we see that 70 per cent of the population lives on one per cent of the land, that the nation's population will probably grow to some 300 million people in the next 30 years, and that sky-rocketing land costs are making housing for all but the favored few too expensive, the case becomes strong for a national urban growth policy and a federal National Urban Growth Agency to implement such a policy.

Such a national agency could help to counter the effects of a fractured society which finds it difficult to solve its housing problems because of the conflicting claims and jurisdictions of local governments and local zoning laws. Taken to-

gether this patchwork of locally-formulated policies and programs amounts to no national policy at all.

One of the first tasks of a National Urban Growth Agency would be to acquire land and "bank" it for future urban development. By taking some land--and it needn't amount to very much--off the speculative market, one of the prime factors in controlling spiraling costs would be neutralized. The agency would then make rational plans for future development, with the opportunity to help create sound, balanced communities.

The agency could also act as a "houser of last resort," assuring an adequate supply of decent housing for low and moderate income families that can't be served by the private market.

It would also be mandated to plan and to build where local governmental units refuse to develop fair and rational plans. A National Urban Growth Agency, financed as other government units and with the power to sell bonds and to build directly could well become the means by which chaos is replaced by fair, rational planning and use of our national resources.

There are ample models for such an agency. European and other countries have had excellent experiences with planned communities and New York State has a state agency that is somewhat similar to what I've suggested.

There is no alternative to development. Our only choice lies in the nature of that development; whether it will continue to be haphazard and unplanned, leading to urban and suburban blight and the exclusion of lower income families, or whether it will be orderly, planned development that solves problems and doesn't, as our present lack of a system does, create them.

We are too far behind in the national promise to provide decent housing for all to be able to avoid the issue for much longer. We know what the problem is, we know past efforts have failed dismally, and now we need the courage to create the tools that will finally get the job done.

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NIXON'S INFLATION CONTROLS HAVE FAILED THE POOR AND BLACK AMERICANS

WASHINGTON D. C. -- The economic conditions of the nation have worsened month after month. The reports are exactly the same this month as they were last month. The Wholesale Index is up again, unemployment is at the same devastating rate.

The situation of the poor and the Black have consistently deteriorated under these conditions. The cost of living has continued to rise while wages have remained frozen. The rate of unemployment among the poor, women, teenagers and Blacks has not remained constant, but increased.

The Congressional Black Caucus, along with millions of Americans, has lost all faith in the empty promises and predictions of the White House economists. There is one conclusion left clear in our minds. The Nixon Administration inflation control mechanism has been ineffective, has been inadequate, and therefore, has failed. This is especially disastrous to the already disadvantaged poor and low-wage earners, who are mostly Black Americans.

With an increase in the cost of living based on the Wholesale Index, which is an addition to all other increases, a constant high rate of unemployment is another discouraging fact. There are more workers unemployed despite a rate that has remained the same. This is based on the greater number of Americans who have entered the job market over the past months.

Even recently reported successful foreign affairs activities of the President cannot distract us from the dreadful deteriorating conditions of the poor, the Black, and the working class American. As Black Members of Congress, we cannot become enthusiastic about any foreign ventures or even consider the support of resulting agreements in the face of such staggering domestic conditions.

The Congressional Black Caucus is equally or more concerned with the issues that have caused the unemployment rate to remain just above or just below 6 percent for the past 18 months. During this time, the Nixon Administration has done nothing to cure the spiraling

cost of living, and the unemployment rates for women and Blacks.

We refuse to accept the repeated excuses in efforts by the Administration to make the American people believe that the unemployment situation is not bad, only because women, teenagers and Blacks are involved. Most of the increases of women and teenagers in the work force are either heads of households, major contributors in poor families, or Black.

The Nixon Administration has blatantly discounted these facts, even to the point of considering to readjust the so-called full employment definition from 4 percent to 5 percent. That is even more preposterous. Such a so-called full employment rate would cause the Black unemployment rate to remain above the 11 percent mark, women above 7 percent, and teenagers above 18 percent.

The Congressional Black Caucus calls upon the Nixon Administration to place full employment at the top of this nation's priority list. We further urge the presentation of new proposals for the domestic economic problems of joblessness, inflation and low wages. Until such satisfaction in these areas is advanced, we find it very difficult to become overly concerned about any foreign issues, except increased support for the oppressed nations of Africa.

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