

# Industry Support Brings Wins for Housing

*By Michael J. Novogradac, CPA*

Last year I wrote several Washington Wire articles stressing the importance of professionals, organizations and companies in the low-income and affordable housing industry working together to ensure better housing opportunities for all Americans.

Yet another example of what can happen when professionals pull together occurred on December 8 when the U.S. House of Representatives approved the FY 2004 appropriations bill (H.R. 2673), providing more than \$17 billion in funding for the Section 8 voucher program, a direct result of efforts by National Housing Conference (NHC) members and affordable housing advocates nationwide who took aim at helping to assure decent, affordable housing for America's working families.

"NHC members and other affordable housing advocates should be commended for their widespread efforts focused on educating key decision-makers on the important role of housing vouchers," said NHC president and CEO Conrad Egan. "While NHC member efforts aimed at preserving housing vouchers were heard by members of Congress, we must continue to work hard in the New Year to secure the future of HOPE VI, as well as other integral housing programs," he added.

The Administration's FY 2004 budget proposal did not include funding for new housing vouchers or the HOPE VI program, but ultimately it was the hard work of affordable housing's staunch supporters that ultimately led to continued funding of these integral programs.

Most congressional effort late last year went into passing a major Medicare Reform bill but the House and Senate were successful in getting votes on their respective HUD spending bills. All told, the House approved a \$328.1 billion FY 2004 spending bill, \$37 billion of it for HUD. This represents \$98 million more than the Administration's budget request. If the omnibus spending bill (See related appropriations story on page 15) is approved by the Senate in late January when it returns from recess, the funding of the Section 8 voucher program will represent an increase of almost \$1 billion over FY 2003. The HOPE VI program is funded at \$150 million in the House-approved bill, a \$424 million cut from HOPE VI funding in 2003. The HOME program would receive more than \$2 billion, including \$40 million for house counseling and \$87 million for the new American Dream Down Payment Act (S. 811), which President Bush signed into law on December 16.

The American Dream Downpayment Act allows HUD to provide down payment assistance to low-income and first-time homebuyers, most often those citizens who do not have the money needed for a down payment.

With some good wins in 2003, the industry faces a promising but challenging year ahead. We have the momentum to propel ourselves into our objective to increase the number of opportunities for providing decent, safe and affordable housing for those who need it most. ❖