

Presidential Candidates' Positions on Housing Vary

By Michael J. Novogradac, CPA

The Bush Administration's stand on housing is very clear - priority one is home ownership for all Americans. But the stance of the Democratic contenders for president is, as a couple of recent stories suggest, far from clear because no candidate speaks to the issue in any great detail.

Sen. John Kerry's (D-Mass.) come-from-behind win in the Iowa Caucus and his position, at least for the time being, as the number one contender for the Democratic nomination, brings his stand on housing to the forefront. However, the coveted front-runner spot could be usurped by another in the New Hampshire primary, to be held just seven days after I write this. In more cases than not in recent history, the winner of this primary was the eventual Democratic candidate for president.

Kerry, a long-time supporter of housing issues, introduced the National Housing Trust Fund Act in the Senate. S. 1411's goal is, over 10 years, to create 1.5 million affordable, mixed-income developments using FHA and Ginnie Mae funding in areas with the greatest opportunities for low-income families. The bill was referred to Senate committee, read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs on July 15, 2003. Kerry says he also supports tax credits to increase affordable housing stock, more Section 8 vouchers, community development block grants and the HOME Investment Partnership program.

John Edwards (D-N.C.), who made a surprising showing in Iowa, sponsored the Rural Rental Housing Act, S. 652. Edwards also proposes to extend homeownership and eradicate housing discrimination. His proposal to introduce the American Dream Tax Credit would offer a matching tax credit of as much as \$5,000 to help low- and moderate-income families cover a down payment on a first home. Edwards says he supports strengthening enforcement of the Fair Housing Act and Equal Credit Opportunity Act, and backs full funding for the Section 8 and HOPE VI programs.

On the community development side, Edwards says he would, over five years, double the funds of Community Development Financial Institutions and prioritize two types of new markets tax credit investments. He would also encourage the creation of high-quality jobs with good wages for individuals who otherwise lack access to them, and he would focus his energies in Economic Revitalization Zones that are often left out of federal assistance.

The Iowa Caucus' early front-runner, Howard Dean (D-Vt.), proposes to pursue three initiatives that would "strengthen affordable housing:" create a National Housing Trust Fund, provide double funding for CDBGs to \$10 billion and concentrate on eliminating predatory lending. According to a UPI story on January 10, Dean's housing record while governor of Vermont emphasized land preservation and local land trusts as a means to preserve affordable housing, the creation of a low-income housing tax credit, and securing grants for affordable assisted-living for seniors.

Hoping to make headway in New Hampshire, retired Gen. Wesley Clark supports full funding of the Section 8 voucher and HOPE VI programs. He also advocates expanding the per person LIHTC allocation to increase investment in construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.

Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), also hoping to make his mark in New Hampshire, cosponsored legislation that was enacted into law at the end of 2000. That law updated the housing tax credit formula to increase the stock of low-income housing rental units. He has opposed President Bush's proposal to eliminate funding for the HOPE VI program, as well as the Administration's efforts to dismantle the Section 8 Voucher program.

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A product of low-income housing, Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) has sponsored or cosponsored many affordable housing related bills, including his co-sponsorship of the National Housing Trust Fund Act. From his web-site, we find that he favors restoring the HUD budget to its 1978 levels and fully funding all existing Section 8 vouchers, while providing additional funding for new incremental vouchers. Additionally, Kucinich favors restoring funds for Section 515 Rural Rental Housing program and supports the Rural Rental Housing Assistance Act, which would create a new \$250 million fund to acquire, rehabilitate or construct rural rental housing for low-income people.

Housing has not been a big stumping topic with the Democratic hopefuls but those listed here have sections on their web site that address the housing issues so important to the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing. We urge you to visit these sites and learn as much as you so that no matter the outcome of the 2004 presidential election, industry professionals know who in Washington can be called upon to support their mission to bring safe, decent and affordable housing to the nation's moderate- and low-income households. ❖