

STATEMENT OF JOHN TRASVINA

**NOMINEE, HUD ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FAIR HOUSING AND EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY**

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

APRIL 23, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today with my prospective colleagues seeking to serve the nation at the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development. It is a high honor to be nominated by President Obama to be Assistant Secretary of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity and I am gratified by the assistance of this committee in considering my nomination today during Fair Housing month and for your favorable recommendation to the full Senate.

In America, civil rights begin at home. As Americans, we are proud of the progress we have made in civil rights -- progress made possible by the energies and insights of members of this Committee and your predecessors dating back forty one years ago to 1968 and the enactment of the Fair Housing Act and prior to that time. And progress made possible by the brave appeals to our true core principles as a nation of fairness by countless individuals and institutions in communities from South to North, urban, metropolitan and rural from coast to coast to coast. The vital importance of carrying out the principles of fair housing for our communities remains today and I bring to the post of Assistant Secretary a career of civil rights leadership, federal government and institutional management and dedication to bring communities together.

The principles of fair housing probably have the greatest impact on our nation's children. If left ignored, the pain and shame of a parent whose family is denied an apartment or home because of race or national origin is felt by a child for a lifetime. But when fair housing is effectively addressed and, better yet, discrimination is prevented, we can

provide a lifetime of recognition and understanding of the protection of the Constitution and our laws and the responsiveness of civil servants. Moreover, where one lives shapes opportunities for an equal education, preparation for the workplace, and access to transportation, culture and myriad other elements of our daily life. Today, as the Obama Administration and Congress work together to provide stability to home ownership, the Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity plays a meaningful role.

From my own experience in San Francisco, I learned from an early age about the ugly denials of a home to accomplished African American men who could pay their way but were denied simply because of racism and the color of their skin. My mother would point out the house on Cedro Way that belonged to Cecil Poole, our United States Attorney, where burned crosses were found to intimidate his family. And a little farther away on Miraloma Way, it took our Republican Mayor George Christopher to intervene with a homeowner who refused to sell his home to San Francisco Giants star Willie Mays because he was black. These overt acts of discrimination have subsided and today our community has moved from almost all white to almost all Black to heavily Chinese, Vietnamese and immigrant.

When I worked for the late Senator Paul Simon as his counsel at the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, I was honored to play a staff role in the passage of the Fair Housing Act amendments of 1988 and speak to disability organizations about the application and extension of the law's important protections. As Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices at the U.S. Department of Justice from 1997 to 2001, I led the federal government's only office devoted solely to immigrant workplace rights. There, we were successful in widespread education to employers and legally authorized workers about their rights and responsibilities under the immigration and employment laws. I am proud of the accomplishments of the career attorneys and legal staff in obtaining back pay for discrimination victims, fining employers to remedy violations, and ensuring that the Office was responsive to all stakeholders. Our

work knew no party. During the three years I served as Special Counsel in a Democratic Administration, we built the foundation for strong performance that carried over into a Republican Administration in which we brought the largest lawsuit ever under our enforcement statute.

I would apply these principles to the Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity to ensure that our partners, whether they are at the Department of Justice, at state and local civil rights agencies, among public interest fair housing advocates, industry associations, or organizations in the housing and lending industries, can carry out their work in furtherance of the Fair Housing Act. In addition, I offer my commitment of cooperation and communication on your ideas and the Administration's on further steps to advance fair housing and equal opportunity.

We have many weapons available to us to eradicate housing bias from our society. All must be used in a coordinated fashion to be effective. The mission goes beyond access to an apartment or house to the lending decisions and the ability to remain in one's home. If confirmed, I will work vigorously to guard against scams that prey upon people's race or ethnicity to thwart their well-laid plans for homeownership or block access to assistance for the same reasons.

Again, I am grateful to President Obama for nominating me to be Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity and giving me the opportunity to serve the nation in this capacity. Similarly, I am highly appreciative of your consideration and consent to my nomination.