

**HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF THE HONORABLE
ALPHONSO JACKSON**

**TO BE THE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT**



**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS**

FEBRUARY 26, 2004

Mr. Chairman, Senator Sarbanes, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would also like to thank Senators Hutchison and Cornyn for their kind introductions.

Let me begin by expressing my profound gratitude to President Bush for his friendship and for his confidence in nominating me as the next Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The highest honor that can be bestowed upon any individual is to ask them to serve their country.

I am delighted that President Bush has asked me to continue my service to a Department in which I have such pride and such high expectations.

Our work at HUD defines the compassionate conservatism the President talks about so often. HUD's mission calls upon us to provide new opportunities and new tools to every American who seeks a better quality of life.

With help and encouragement from our Department, families across this Nation are lifting themselves toward prosperity.

I understand their journey in a very personal way, because it is my own.

I come from humble means, the last of 12 children born to Arthur and Henrietta Jackson. We never had a lot of money growing up in Texas, and my father juggled three jobs to keep food on the table. But our household was never short of love. My siblings and I were blessed with devoted parents who made certain their children were well prepared to face the world. They stressed again and again that with a good education and a strong work ethic, we could accomplish anything we chose to tackle.

If my mother and my father were with us today, they would no doubt be proud of the path I have chosen.

I have been guided throughout my life by the belief that we best serve our neighbors in need by empowering them to pursue their dreams. As a college student, I traveled to Alabama to help register black voters during the defining days of the civil rights movement. These were violent times, and I witnessed vicious acts of inhumanity. But I also saw that the hope of a better tomorrow was a strong and motivating force.

Before coming to HUD, I ran urban public housing authorities in St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and Dallas. We faced the same problems that your communities deal with, too. This gave me insight into the needs of public housing authorities and how HUD relates to them. Through my chairmanship of two community development block grant agencies, I gained a practical understanding of the ways in which HUD works in partnership with state and local governments to rejuvenate America's cities.

I emerged with strong ideas about how HUD could work better for families and communities.

My experiences as a public servant are balanced by my work in the private sector. There, I learned the importance of effective management in a successful enterprise. Whether in government or in business, sound management and excellence in program performance are critical to an organization's success.

Committee Members are acutely aware of HUD's troubled past. Throughout its history, the Department has been plagued by management challenges that left it vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse. Early in this Administration, the President made it clear that restoring credibility and accountability to HUD must be our top priority. And so I worked alongside Secretary Mel Martinez to instill a new commitment to real results in HUD's program areas... and a new commitment to the highest ethical standards in our workforce and among our grant partners.

I have visited 30 of HUD's field offices in virtually every state represented by this Committee. At each office, I met with our employees to get their thoughts on how HUD's leadership could help them better serve your communities. After hearing their suggestions, I undertook a strategic realignment of HUD's entire field office structure. Decisions that used to be made in Washington have been delegated to our regional and local offices. Today, they are making decisions for themselves that used to get lost in layers of bureaucracy at Headquarters.

We are striving to make HUD work better and smarter than it has in years.

I personally am very proud that we are helping more people than ever before realize the American Dream.

Homeownership last year reached an all-time high of 68.3 percent. At the end of 2003, for the first time ever, more than half of all minority households owned a home in their community.

As you know, boosting the number of homeowners – and minority homeowners in particular – is one of the President's domestic priorities, and a personal priority of mine.

I want to thank the Chairman and this Committee for your leadership in enacting the American Dream Downpayment Act last year. Your commitment will help clear the path to homeownership for 40,000 families annually. HUD continues its work to simplify the process of buying a home and make it less costly for consumers. The President has proposed a tax credit that would spur the creation of affordable homes in communities where they are desperately needed. And we are offering families new opportunities to become self-sufficient by helping them make the move from assisted housing into homeownership.

With your support, and the support of HUD's partners at the grassroots level, I want to build on these achievements. It is within our power to solve the challenges of housing affordability, availability, and community renewal.

Mr. Chairman, as you can see, I feel passionate about the issues of housing and community development that lie at the heart of HUD's mission. But more importantly, I am passionate about the people that our programs touch: the young family taking out their first mortgage... the homeless person climbing the ladder to self-sufficiency... the single mother moving out of public housing into her own home... the senior citizen living in dignity in retirement... the child playing safely in a home free of toxic lead.

If confirmed, I intend to remain a forceful advocate for those who turn to HUD for a helping hand.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development holds tremendous promise as an agency of empowerment. I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle to meet the challenges ahead of us as we strengthen HUD's ability to carry out its mission... and help the Nation's housing agency fulfill its promise.

Thank you.