

**January 28, 2021**  
**Nominations Hearing**  
**Opening Statement**

Today we consider the nominations of two distinguished public servants, my Congresswoman – Marcia Fudge to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development – and Dr. Cecilia Rouse to lead the Council of Economic Advisors.

Most of us have met with them. We are impressed with their knowledge, their commitment, and their passion to serve, especially during the current public health and economic crisis. Thank you, Congresswoman Fudge and Dr. Rouse.

Our economy is at a crossroads. COVID-19 infections are up, new unemployment claims continue to rise, and millions of families are behind on their bills – on rent, on utilities, on mortgage payments.

We face a choice: Will we finally marshal all of our country's vast resources and talent to meet this moment? Will we help all the families that desperately need it, help our struggling small businesses survive, and get Americans vaccinated and back to school and back to work and back to seeing their grandparents and grandchildren?

Or, will we sit back and watch as millions of families face the threat of eviction, as people drain meager savings account or head to payday lenders, as job losses become permanent, and racial and economic inequality get worse?

President Biden nominated Congresswoman Fudge and Dr. Rouse to positions that will be essential to determining which path we take, during this pandemic and in the years ahead.

And I can think of no one better to lead us out of this pandemic and into the future than the two women before us today.

After a year when Black Americans have endured so many painful reminders of the yawning gap between the promise of our founding ideals, and our failure to make that promise real for everyone, two Black women will take leading roles in our economic recovery.

This matters on so many levels. It's important for our future that little girls, including Black and brown girls, see themselves in our leaders, from the Vice President to our economic leaders.

And it matters because of the perspectives and the life experiences these two women – these two Black women – bring to these jobs.

They both have ties to Ohio – one a daughter of Cleveland, of the industrial Midwest, and the other with roots deep into the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown.

And Congresswoman Fudge and Dr. Rouse bring a real understanding of the people who make this country work – all people – to these jobs.

If confirmed, Congresswoman Fudge will lead an agency that supports families and communities, provides housing and safety to people experiencing homelessness from this pandemic, and helps communities rebuild.

Today, HUD is grappling with a housing market where millions of families find it harder and harder to afford a decent home. The cost of housing is up, wages are flat, and so many workers have trouble making rent every

month without crippling stress, or turning to predatory loans. And the dream of home ownership is increasingly out of reach.

None of this started with COVID-19. The affordable housing crisis is the product of decades of conscious policy decisions – by both government and corporations. This pandemic has exposed what millions of families in this country already knew – that too many people are struggling to get by.

Before the U.S. had its first case of COVID-19, a quarter of all renters were already paying more than half their income for housing, and the Black homeownership rate was nearly as low as it was in 1968, when housing discrimination was legal.

HUD should play an essential role in fixing that – in expanding opportunity to every zip code, and allowing more families to have the peace of mind and the economic security of a safe home they can afford.

Congresswoman Fudge will work to help protect our kids from lead poisoning, to restore the promise of fair housing, and to give communities the help and resources they need to thrive.

All of this is a tall order, but it is one I know she is poised to meet. And she brings to the job the unique and critical experience of serving as mayor for the kind of community that is either overlooked, or outright preyed upon, by Wall Street and big investors.

We cannot write off entire swaths of the country – whether it's a coal town or an historic industrial city, whether it's farm country or an urban neighborhood. This champion of Cleveland understands that.

The Council of Economic Advisors will also play an integral role both in helping our economy recover and in building a better system out of this pandemic. And Dr. Rouse is exactly who we need at the helm. If confirmed, she will help direct our nation's economic policy to put Americans back to work, at better jobs with higher wages.

Millions of people are still out of work, and those job losses have disproportionately fallen on low-wage workers, Black and brown workers, and women. At the same time, essential workers are risking their health to go to work, while corporations still refuse to pay them a living wage.

It's all part of the corporate business model that treats American workers as expendable, instead of as essential to our country's success. For decades, workers' wages have remained stagnant while CEO pay has skyrocketed. "Building Back Better" means taking on that system, and creating an economy with a growing, thriving middle class.

This won't be the first time Dr. Rouse has helped us weather a crisis – she served on the Council of Economic Advisors in 2009, during the Great Recession.

Dr. Rouse, has spent her career focusing on workers and ensuring that this economy works for everyone. Her expertise and leadership will guide this Administration and Congress in formulating the policies that can help revive our economy so that it works for all Americans.

And both she and Congresswoman Fudge will look at how we can protect families from climate change, while seizing opportunities to create new jobs, advance environmental justice, and grow new industries. Making our homes and communities more energy efficient isn't just necessary for our future – it's the kind of investment that will put people to work at jobs that can't be outsourced, and will spur new economic growth.

We know we face great challenges. These are extraordinary times that call for us to aim higher and think bigger, to deliver real results that make a difference in people's lives.

I look forward to hearing how each of you will help chart the course out of this pandemic and build a brighter future in the years ahead.

I have a number of letters of support that I would ask unanimous support to submit for the record.

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