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**Let Us Continue:
Housing Policy in the Great Society, Part One**

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“Today, in this moment of new resolve, I would say to all my fellow Americans, let us continue.”

-Lyndon Baines Johnson¹

Introduction

On November 27, 1963, just five days after John F. Kennedy’s assassination, the new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, addressed a shocked nation. With solemn and fervent words he urged “let us continue” and pledged to carry on the martyred leader’s programs—such as the Peace Corps, education, care for the elderly, and civil rights. Six weeks later at the annual State of the Union address, Johnson invoked the cause of Kennedy’s programs again, raising them up as essential to the memory of the martyred leader. Nineteen days after giving his State of the Union speech, the new president delivered another message to Congress, his first on a single subject, and laid out his housing program for the year. Within hours Democrats in the House and Senate had introduced bills that embodied Johnson’s proposals.² As it was in so many legislative areas, Johnson’s time in office would be fruitful for housing policy; indeed, it was the most productive since Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.

The first two years of the Johnson presidency, including the exceptional legislative outburst of the eighty-ninth Congress, were extraordinarily productive. In the housing arena, his administration enacted three major laws, each of which followed the “let us continue” theme that Johnson had voiced. These bills were in large part products of Kennedy’s administration. The Housing Act of 1964 was an omnibus bill that was being prepared when the young president was killed. The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 built on the 1964 law by including provisions that had failed in 1964 and introducing the low-income rent supplements program, which the federal housing agency had been working on since early in Kennedy’s term. The third law, passed in 1965, created a cabinet for housing and urban affairs, which Kennedy had first proposed unsuccessfully to Congress in 1961.

¹ Address before a Joint Session of the Congress, November 27, 1963, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), and John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25988>.

² *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64*, Volume I, entry 91, 112-118 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1965); Eileen Shanahan, “Housing Message Asks Aid to Poor and to Suburbs,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1964, 1.

The housing programs of the early Johnson years, however, did more than just continue the Kennedy legacy. They continued the liberal reform tradition of urban and housing programs, such as public housing and urban renewal, which extended back in time through Harry S. Truman's Fair Deal of the late 1940s to Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

The responsibility for developing housing policy under Johnson fell to Robert C. Weaver, the Administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA). Although Kennedy had originally appointed him, Weaver established a good working relationship with Johnson in the years after the assassination. The new president believed strongly in housing and respected Weaver's abilities. LBJ employed his legislative wizardry to convince Congress to pass his housing chief's proposals. In late 1965, however, political problems and differences of personality and expectations led to a difficult and, for Weaver painful, period in the two men's relationship. Weaver would persevere but at a cost to his ability to set the nation's housing agenda.

Producing Policy for a Great Society

As he took the reins in his first year as president, Lyndon Johnson imposed his own methods of developing and pushing legislation. Weaver, the housing agency chief and veteran of the Washington bureaucracy, accommodated himself to the new boss relatively easily. But even before the 1964 housing act was approved, a new system for pushing policy had emerged.

President Lyndon Johnson's ability to influence Congress is legendary—after all, his legislative record is arguably the most successful of any president in American history. In explaining his success, most observers have noted the “LBJ treatment” in which through manipulation and force of personality Johnson bent people to his will. The many dramatic examples of the president's persuasiveness—such as the president convincing Senator Richard Russell of Georgia to serve on the Warren Commission or back the civil rights law—are impressive, yet his strategic approach to legislation was more complex than simple individual persuasion.

The Johnson administration followed a striking and somewhat unique method for proposing and pursuing housing legislation. As many have noted, LBJ liked to use task forces to explore or develop policies. Yet sometimes the role of the task forces was more political than

intellectual. Some important ideas that the task forces suggested had already been put forward in one form or another by the HHFA.³

While interest groups—mainly the liberal groups—did not dictate legislation, both the White House and the housing agency whenever possible took them into account in composing laws. Even a cursory look at the Weaver’s correspondence shows that he had a warm first-name relationship with many liberal housing leaders. Similarly, the president received messages from the leading liberal interest groups about the administration’s programs. Industry organizations, in contrast, complained that Weaver was not friendly to them, but it all depended on which one. National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) leaders such as Leon Weiner and Larry Blackmon had access to both Weaver and the White House.

To work up proposals into a legislative program, Weaver and his aides developed briefing papers on issues (“What Form of Subsidy Will Best Enable Low- and Medium-Income City Dwellers to Meet Housing Needs?”), detailing a recommendation, assembling the case for and against it (so as to be ready for arguments inside and outside Congress), and assessing which lobby groups were likely to favor or oppose the proposal. Unlike under Kennedy when the White House had relatively little to say about housing legislation, Johnson and his top aides insisted not only on signing off on any housing proposals, but also on making suggestions about legislation of their own. To put together a housing legislative program, the White House also wanted the opinions of top aides—such as domestic advisers Bill Moyers, Joseph Califano, or speech writer Richard Goodwin—and the heads of departments besides the housing agency, such as the Council of Economic Advisers, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Bureau of the Budget.⁴

The White House under LBJ then devised or at the least helped devise the strategies for introducing legislation to the Congress. This political work included not only determining who in the Congress should coordinate the bill’s progress, but also putting together and disseminating the administration’s arguments in favor of the bill. As the head of the HHFA and later the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Weaver generally led off the testimony

³ Harold Wolman, *Politics of Federal Housing* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1971), 81-104.

⁴ [Robert Weaver/HHFA staff], Briefing Papers (variously named) in loose-leaf binder, Outline of 1965 Housing Message and Legislative Proposals, Secretary Weaver’s Subject Files, 1960-69, Record Group 207, National Archives, College Park, Md. (hereafter RG 207, NA); Memo, Moyers to Richard Goodwin, Subject: Meeting regarding 1966 Legislative Program in the area of Housing, July 23, 1965, Folder 11/22/63-12/21/65, EX HS 11/22/63, Box 1, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJ).

at Congressional committee hearings, although sometimes other members of the administration would also testify.

The administration—the housing agency or even the White House—encouraged supportive lobbying groups to press the Congress to pass the given bill. Most of the time the Johnson administration—both White House and the federal housing agency—kept on good terms with the liberal housing groups, which in any case were inclined to support the largest appropriations in years for public housing and urban renewal programs. Even more than Kennedy who had made overtures to the housing industry, Johnson went out of his way to connect with NAHB.

Since the most effective pressure on congressmen came from local constituents, the administration sometimes started a chain of activity to generate local support. During the campaign to pass the 1965 housing bill, for example, Johnson called the executive vice-president of NAHB who called five leading Texas homebuilders to ask them to contact home builders in five different congressional districts to persuade their congressmen. For any such action he took, the meticulous president later demanded a report on the results. More generally, Johnson and his men kept track of publicity—editorials and the like—pertaining to housing bills and, when possible, placed positive pieces in the press. With a notoriously thin-skinned president, administration officials paid attention to what their critics had to say, issuing rebuttals or sometimes ignoring them as unimportant and then informing the White House of their actions and the reasons for them.⁵

Once the proposal went to Capitol Hill, Johnson's men kept careful tallies, which Johnson regularly reviewed, of the likely yea and nay voters. With this knowledge, administration officials could strategize about such matters as which chamber should initiate legislation, to what committees the legislation might be best assigned, and how leaning congressmen might be persuaded to support a bill. At crucial points, the president would place calls to key congressmen and press them for their votes.⁶

⁵ Memorandum, Jake Jacobsen, July 1, 1965 Folder 11/22/63-12/21/65, EX HS 11/22/63, Box 1, LBJ.

⁶ Robert C. Weaver to The President, February 8, 1966, Folder Dept. of HUD 01/26/66-02/24/66, Box 252, LBJ (this folder contains several examples of progress reports and vote counts in regard to rent supplement legislation in February 1966). For Johnson's legislative technique in regard to a wide range of legislation, see Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Joseph A. Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: the White House Years* (York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

An Underappreciated Housing Law

Soon after he assumed the presidency, Lyndon Johnson learned about the “attack on poverty” that Kennedy and his men had been mulling over. LBJ liked the idea, and in characteristic style, escalated it rhetorically to all-out combat. “This administration today, here and now,” the new president told the Congress on January 8, 1964 in his first State of the Union address, “declares unconditional war on poverty in America.”

This declaration of hostilities, however, preceded a precise battle plan. It would take the fledgling Johnson administration a few months to develop the Economic Opportunity Act that laid out the central operations of the war on poverty. In the meantime, Robert Weaver promptly responded to the president’s call to arms. The HHFA had been readying a housing and urban development bill before Kennedy was assassinated. Weaver now scribbled “poverty program” at the top of his list of housing and urban items for the president to propose in his first major legislative message to Congress. On January 27, 1964, the president—following Weaver’s recommendations—put forward a wide-ranging and omnibus bill, which he then sent up to Capitol Hill where hearings were held on it in late February. As Johnson had recommended, this legislation continued earlier efforts—not only efforts undertaken under the late President Kennedy but also those housing reformers had long pursued to carry out their urban agenda.⁷

It is easy to overlook the 1964 housing act. It lacked the far-reaching significance of three other 1964 Kennedy-Johnson measures—the tax cut law, the Civil Rights Act, and the anti-poverty Economic Opportunity Act. It did not have the spectacular scope of the urban legislation passed later in the Great Society administration, and the one-year time limit it imposed on programs made it something of a stopgap measure. The money put into the new act was only a quarter of the funding for Kennedy’s 1961 housing act, leading some observers to slight the 1964 bill as “bare-bones.” Although Congress had whittled down Weaver’s request for urban renewal funding and omitted financing for college housing (the other big ticket item in the 1961 law), the \$1.2 billion the Congress appropriated in the bill was by no means a small figure.⁸

⁷ Memo, Kermit Gordon, Director of Bureau of the Budget to the President, December 11, 1963, Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, EX FG 240-1 6/1/68, Folder FG 245 Housing and Home Finance Agency 6/11/65 – 9/23/65, LBJ; [Robert C. Weaver], Subjects for Presidential Message, December 18, 1963, Folder Subject Poverty Attack 1964 Weaver, Box 135, Subject Correspondence Files; Robert C. Weaver (hereafter Weaver Correspondence), RG 207, NA.

⁸ The 1961 act had authorized \$2 billion for urban renewal and \$1.2 billion for college housing, authorizations of which the Congress and the Johnson administration raised again in 1965.

Other critics considered the 1964 housing bill the usual compromise between housing industry demands and social welfare needs.⁹ It was true that in many respects, the administration's proposal followed old policy grooves. The 1964 bill proposed renewing provisions that Congress had enacted in the 1961 law and resubmitted earlier plans that Congress had rejected. Like the housing acts of the 1950s and 1961, it carried forth the old favorites, public housing and urban renewal. The bill provided funding for the first new public housing dwellings over and above the authorizations of the Housing Act of 1949 (it had taken fifteen years for Congress to appropriate funds that were supposed to have been allotted in six). Weaver asked for \$1.4 billion for the urban renewal program, although Congress would reduce that sum to \$725 million.

Weaver, following another tradition of recent years, also trundled forward housing programs for special population groups. The previous year's building boom in which builders started work on 1.6 million dwellings, President Johnson explained, had left out "too many minorities, too many families of low income, too many elderly, too many rural families, and too many military families."¹⁰

To alleviate the plights of the latter groups, the bill entitled single old people to FHA elderly housing, created a new program to fund nonprofit housing for farm laborers, and allowed the Veterans Administration to use Fannie Mae (the Federal National Mortgage Association) to pool and sell its mortgages. More significantly, the law expanded the list of special low-income classes by adding "the handicapped," whom it declared eligible for all elderly housing programs.¹¹

The administration proposed other old favorites—community facilities and urban research—and two Kennedy proposals that Congress had refused to enact—mass transportation and the creation of a new cabinet department for housing and urban affairs.¹²

If the 1964 housing act continued traditional programs of urban renewal and public housing, the debate in Congress revealed growing unrest about their direction. In the years

⁹ *New York Times*, September 18, 1964, 34, cited in Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 361.

¹⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Housing and Community Development," January 27th, 1964.

¹¹ Among the most important of the elderly programs was the direct loan program (Section 202). The 1964 law set a precedent in regard to the handicapped who have been included in housing laws up to the present. The Congress approved the president's call for increasing the funds for military family housing (another special although not necessarily low-income population group) in a separate bill in August 1964 (Public Law 88-586).

¹² Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Housing and Community Development," January 27th, 1964

following its enactment as Title I of the Housing Act of 1949, a rising tide of controversy had engulfed the urban redevelopment program, or urban renewal as it was now known. Redevelopment projects took an unconscionably long time to complete, and when finished, they frequently placed luxury homes or large commercial buildings where middle- and low-income people used to live. So many African-American neighborhoods were demolished that critics dubbed the program “Negro removal.” Starting in the 1950s, citizens bitterly protested the schemes that threatened their communities, and in some cases—notably West Greenwich Village in New York—even prevailed against the authorities. But in Philadelphia, Chicago, and most other cities, urban renewal projects succeeded in removing homes, and many of the former inhabitants could not return because the redeveloped areas now were too expensive or no longer contained any residences. The redevelopment projects often increased racial segregation in the cities. A chorus of critics, the most eloquent of whom were Jane Jacobs and Martin Anderson, condemned urban renewal, and by the early 1960s the program “had become a pariah to some of those who had originally supported it.”¹³

Although housing reformers agonized about the program’s destruction of the homes of low-income and racial-minority households, local officials, downtown business leaders, and a surprising number of liberals strongly supported such “improvements.” Many reformers did not question the assumptions of the program but instead focused on its failure to find former residents of urban renewal sites new homes to replace those it had destroyed. To address this problem, HHFA chief Weaver wrote into the administration bill two-years worth of monthly payments toward the rent of “displaced” families and elderly, a provision that sailed through unchallenged. In this restricted fashion rent supplements debuted.¹⁴

Sensing political weakness, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, an arch-conservative member of the business anti-public housing coalition, coordinated a broad attack on the urban

¹³ Jon C. Teaford, “Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11:2, 446-448 (quotation); see also Jon C. Teaford *The Rough Road to Renaissance - Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Alexander von Hoffman, “A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11:2, 299-326.

¹⁴ Joel Schwartz *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Robert C. Weaver, *The Urban Complex: Human Values in Urban Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1960), 47-48, 50-54, 81-82; Nathaniel S. Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), 153-157; Statement of Robert C. Weaver, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 34-35. Jane Jacobs offered the first thorough rejection—and non-ideological critique—of the urban renewal program. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1964).

renewal program. The Chamber sent each member of Congress a lengthy letter containing statistics for that member's state purporting to show that federal aid for public housing and urban renewal went to cities that least needed the funds. They also helped publish anti-urban renewal articles in a variety of publications—including, according to Alabama congressman Albert Rains, a piece in *Reader's Digest*. The Chamber had opposed the program for years, but the increasing non-ideological resistance to rampant demolition of businesses and homes gave the critique credibility. Although the United States Conference of Mayors countered with a survey of nearly 600 mayors showing widespread local business support for urban renewal projects, the controversy over urban renewal gave conservative congressmen enough traction to cut the program's funding significantly below the amount Weaver and the administration requested.¹⁵

The increasing citizen unrest about urban planning threats fed the right-wing attacks and turned both administration and Congress towards a less destructive method of reviving decaying neighborhoods. The housing rehabilitation and code enforcement formula was first inscribed as “urban renewal” in the federal Housing Act of 1954. From the start the NAHB and National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) had championed the idea of renovating rather than demolishing blighted neighborhoods mainly as a way to stop public housing. Since then, the representatives of local officials—the National League of Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM), and National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO)—had adopted the cause.

Although he approved of code enforcement and rehab, Weaver seems not to have been particularly enthusiastic about them. He supported these methods partly because they would upgrade urban living conditions but partly because they would lessen citizen opposition to urban renewal projects. Weaver's thinking about them ran mainly toward difficulties in implementation, which he thought was better left to local not federal authorities. He feared that rehabilitation could raise rents above the reach of low-income families yet also insisted that if building codes were not standardized, they would allow slum conditions to persist. Most of all, Weaver, like many planners of the time, was enamored of the large-scale land-clearance style of

¹⁵ Memo, William Slayton, Urban Renewal Commissioner, to Robert Weaver, August 12, 1964, subject: “Anti-Urban Renewal Activities of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.” Folder, “Chamber of Commerce,” Box 135, Weaver Correspondence, RG 207, NA; Statement of the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) in United States House of Representatives Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing of the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, Eighty-eighth Congress, second session, on H.R. 9751...* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), 519-520.

urban redevelopment, which he thought might help create racially integrated neighborhoods, and thus he looked to preserve urban renewal much as it was conceived in the 1940s. As a result, the HHFA administrator's proposal for the 1964 housing act contained only one provision for rehabilitation—below-market-rate loans to the elderly in urban renewal areas to rehab their homes—and omitted code enforcement from the 1964 bill.¹⁶

Liberal as well as industry organizations found Weaver's gestures toward code enforcement and rehab insufficient and urged the Congress to go further than the 1964 HHFA bill. The housing and urban redevelopment officials expressed deep concern that the administration's bill was missing a code enforcement section. NAHRO's president, Ira Robbins, called for expanding the proposed rehab loans from the elderly to all low- and moderate-income families in urban renewal areas and declared that financially pressed homeowners wherever they lived should receive very low or no-interest loans to fix up their homes. Even the ardent public housers of the National Housing Conference (NHC) joined the chorus, calling for more money for rehabilitation.¹⁷

Despite the emerging consensus in favor of rehabbing neighborhoods, there were some doubts about its efficacy. Philadelphia mayor James Tate, speaking for the United States Conference of Mayors, favored rehabilitation but thought it needed tools stronger than federal mortgage insurance, which had failed to produce significant results. In Baltimore, a strict code enforcement campaign provoked a citizens' revolt, similar to those breaking out against neighborhood demolition plans. Led by housewives in an organization named Hoohah, a moniker

¹⁶ Weaver, *The Urban Complex*, 98-101, 104-107; Robert C. Weaver, Oral History, conducted by Morton J. Schussheim, December 19, 1985, 8-9; *Pioneers in Housing*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C, Memo, Milton P. Semer to Robert C. Weaver, March 27, 1964, Transmittal Slip, Robert Weaver to Milton P. Semer, March 24, 1964, Box 131, Weaver Correspondence. Years later Weaver downplayed his support for clearance and said he pushed rehabilitation, but the evidence shows he was most focused on the relocation and civil rights aspects of urban renewal. See Robert C. Weaver, Oral History, interviewer Joe B. Frantz, November 19, 1968, LBJ, 10.

¹⁷ Statement of Mayor James H.J. Tate of the City of Philadelphia on behalf of the United States Conference of Mayors, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 541-542; Statement of Ira S. Robbins, President, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 249, 263-266, 292, 293-5; Statement of Nathaniel S. Keith, President, National Housing Conference, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 320-322; "NAHRO'S Fifth National Codes Workshop," *Journal of Housing* 21:4 (May 1964) 206-209. There was a split among the mayors between those who preferred urban redevelopment based on land clearance, but the two were not mutually exclusive. See Suzanne Farkas, *Urban Lobbying; Mayors in the Federal Arena* (New York, New York University Press, 1971), 220-221; Alexander von Hoffman, "Enter the Housing Industry, Stage Right."

that proved irresistible to the *Wall Street Journal*, the publicity caused HHFA officials to fret over whether this posed a threat to government prerogatives in code enforcement inspections.¹⁸

Weaver's indifference created a political vacuum into which leapt Republican Congressman William Widnall of New York who introduced a "Housing and Neighborhood Rehabilitation" bill as an alternative to the HHFA legislation. Widnall proposed procedures to make it more difficult to carry out wholesale clearance of small businesses and homes and called for the creation of a large revolving fund for loans to property owners in urban renewal areas to renovate their buildings and thereby avoid condemnation and demolition. The background of criticism of urban renewal and support for rehabilitation provided political ballast to convince Congress to incorporate Widnall's proposals encouraging code enforcement and rehab into the 1964 housing act. These provisos allowed the use of federal funds to enforce building codes, required that demolition projects could not receive federal financing unless the HHFA Administrator (no less) certified that rehabilitation would not achieve the same objective, and authorized \$50 million in loans to property owners in urban renewal areas to renovate their buildings and thereby avoid condemnation and demolition.¹⁹

Public housing had its own problems. Local housing authorities produced apartment buildings that looked like institutional warehouses for the poor. The projects seemed to contain growing proportions of poor people, including an increasing number of households the authorities deemed "problem families." As the number of African American tenants increased, concerns arose that public housing projects were becoming racial ghettos. Middle-class whites fiercely resisted racially integrated projects in their neighborhoods, thus making it increasingly difficult for public housing authorities to find new sites for projects outside the boundaries of the cities' racial ghettos. Meanwhile, bureaucratic inertia, both in Washington and in the cities, choked what was left of the program's vitality.

To help remedy the program's ills, Weaver tucked into the 1964 bill two alternatives to the standard formula in which a government body developed and managed new projects. In the first instance, the legislation would allow local housing authorities to buy existing apartments

¹⁸ Statement of Mayor James H.J. Tate, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 542; Memo, Milton P. Semer to Robert C. Weaver, March 27, 1964, Box 131, Weaver Correspondence; Raymond J. Wise, "Housing Hassle," *Wall Street Journal*, March 24, 1964.

¹⁹ "Housing and Home Finance Agency Views on H.R. 9771, the "Housing and Neighborhood Rehabilitation Act of 1964," and "Reply of Congressman William B. Widnall, of New Jersey...to Views of HHFA..." in Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751* 210-221; *Housing a Nation* (Washington, D. C., Congressional Quarterly Service: 1966), 51-53.

and then let them as public housing units. The second method authorized local housing agencies to rent another 40,000 units and sublet them to eligible low-income families. These proposals offered a partial response to the housing industry's criticisms of relying on new construction and ignoring the private market. By scattering low-income dwellings, Weaver also clearly hoped to help the housing authorities avoid the deadlock over finding acceptable sites for new projects, the greatest source of political opposition to public housing, and prevent the concentrations of very poor people that had emerged in several large projects around the country.

The Johnson administration's proposals for America's venerable low-income housing program evoked predictable responses. The pro-public housing groups—NHC, AFL-CIO, NAHRO, Catholic Charities, and the like—resoundingly approved but tried to up the ante. They wanted still more public housing units, not to mention social services in the projects. On the other side, Weaver's new ideas for scattering public housing into existing buildings failed to sway traditional opponents, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Lumber and Building Dealers Association. "If there is one fixed star in the constellation of our ideas," the representative of NAREB explained, "it is the belief and conviction that the public ownership of family shelter is inherently wrong."²⁰

Weaver, who had failed in 1961 to get federal funding for exurban land banks, tried another approach to regional planning. In the proposed legislation, he attempted to get government funding to help private developers build well-planned new towns. Here again Weaver attempted to meet a long-held goal of the regional-planning type of public housers such as Catherine Bauer: the creation of attractive communities for a range of different income groups in the "vacant lands" outside cities. The 1964 bill did contain land planning provisions, an authorization to provide up to \$25 million for local jurisdictions to purchase open spaces, another \$30 million authorized for urban planning in economically depressed areas, and, thanks to Pennsylvania Senator Joseph Clark, a small program to pay for graduate training for city planners.

Neither the public-housing leasing reforms nor new communities survived Congress in 1964, but they would soon return in other legislation. As HHFA counsel Milton P. Semer noted, Congress was not of a mind to let the agency wander in the vineyards of new housing and metropolitan planning programs. On the other hand, a conservative revolt in the Senate aimed at

²⁰ Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 319 (NHC); 550 (AFL-CIO); 250-251 (NAHRO); 827-828 (Catholic Charities); 720-723 (USCC); 841 (National Lumber and Building Dealers Association); Statement of Lyn E Davis...on Behalf of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, 357 (quotation).

eliminating the public housing and urban renewal programs fizzled. With a national election to be held that fall, the Congress and the Johnson administration agreed to scale back the length and size of proposals and return to urban policy after the voting.²¹

If Weaver's urban housing program and the responses to it mostly continued past patterns, LBJ nonetheless had shaken the political landscape. Johnson's call to go to war on poverty reverberated among those involved in American housing policy. For some, such as Ira Robbins, president of NAHRO and long-time public houser, the president's crusade offered a valuable political opportunity to further their goals. Just as Weaver offered the HHFA's previous legislative agenda as a tool in the president's attack on poverty, the supporters of liberal housing reform now submitted their organizations' agenda in the anti-poverty cause. John F. Collins, Mayor of Boston, and spokesman for the American Municipal Association, went so far as to reverse the priority by welcoming Johnson's "all-out attack on the roots of poverty in America" as a way to help achieve the longstanding goal of a decent home and a suitable environment for all Americans.²²

More surprising, the NAHB appeared to take a step away from the ranks of the housing industry. Gone was the bitter tone of opposition of the other industry representatives. "We are a group of sincere businessmen," NAHB president William Blackfield explained to the House Subcommittee on Housing, "and we certainly are touched by and hope to support President Johnson's crusade against poverty as it exists in the field of housing."²³ After an internal fight over whether to embrace federal subsidies for low-income housing, the home builders' leaders had decided to fall in with the Johnson administration. Signaling their desire to collaborate, NAHB officials downplayed their eternal opposition to public housing. Although they believed public housing was "not the best way" to provide low-income housing, the home builders acknowledged that private industry had not yet found a way to house the very poor either. Thus, they supported increasing the funds for the low-income housing demonstration program,

²¹ Keith, *Politics*, 157-158; Gelfand, *Nation of Cities*, 358.

²² "President's Corner: NAHRO President Ira S. Robbins Relates Emerging Major Issues of 1964 to NAHRO Job," *Journal of Housing* 21:1 (January 1964), 42; Statement of John F. Collins on behalf of the American Municipal Association, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 407. See also John F. Collins to the President, April 29, 1964, Folder Urban Development 11/23/63- 12/08/64, FG 170, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Box 254, LBJ.

²³ Testimony of William Blackfield before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Housing, February 27, 1964, Box 10-020, Folder 06 (vol. 1) Subject File: Housing Legislation (1964-1965), NAHB.

Weaver's policy laboratory, in the hope of discovering a way private enterprise could solve the problem. Significantly, NAHB refused to endorse Republican Congressman Widnall's bill, which was closer in many respects to the traditional conservative stance on housing issues.²⁴

Housing Act of 1965

Even for a postwar omnibus housing bill, the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 was a breathtakingly large piece of legislation. Like other bills of the 1960s, it expanded and adjusted familiar programs. The law authorized over the next four years 240,000 new units of public housing and \$2.9 billion for urban renewal, some of which was earmarked—Weaver had at last gotten religion—for building code enforcement and rehabilitation. The bill increased loan funds for college housing by \$300 million and for elderly and handicapped housing by \$150 million and also broadened the scope of veterans and rural housing.

The most noteworthy innovations, the rent supplement program and a provision allowing the purchase or lease of existing homes for public housing, followed another trend of the decade: the involvement of the private sector in low-income housing.²⁵ In addition, the 1965 act generously gave grants to homeowners in urban renewal areas to rehab their houses, to local governments to build community centers for health, recreational, or social services, and to suburbs for up to half the cost of building water and sewer lines.²⁶

The Sad Saga of Rent Supplements

None of Weaver's innovations in low-income housing attracted more attention and controversy than rent supplements. The concept has a long history. From the late 1930s through the 1940s, conservative representatives of the housing industry—such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and NAREB—proposed “rent certificates” as a way of providing low-income

²⁴ Statement of William Blackfield, President, National Association of Home Builders, *Hearings on H.R. 9751*, 635, and see exchange between Widnall and Blackfield, 644; Ad Hoc Committee Appointed on March 17 to Study Widnall Bill on Urban Renewal, Report to William Blackfield, president NAHB, n.d., Multifamily Housing and Urban Renewal Report No. 17, Report of the Multifamily Housing and Urban Renewal Committee, Governmental Services Division, Meeting Held in Washington, D.C., April 22, 1964, NAHB archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NAHB); “Builders Back Subsidized Mid-Income Housing,” *House and Home*, 25:1 (January 1964), 6-7.

²⁵ Congress had rejected a similar measure in 1964. For the trend to private sector approaches, see Rachel G. Bratt, *Rebuilding a Low-Income Housing Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 61ff.

²⁶ Besides adjusting interest rates and increasing amounts available for FHA programs, the act's many provisions also included new FHA mortgage insurance programs to pay for land purchase and installing infrastructure and authorized grants for beautifying urban areas.

housing without public housing. Leading housing reformers, however, adamantly condemned the idea as a reward for the bad behavior of slumlords who would likely raise rents. The Roosevelt and Truman administrations, as well as Senator Robert Taft, chairman of the influential postwar Housing Subcommittee, agreed and took no action on the proposal. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Housing considered the idea briefly but dropped it as untenable.²⁷

There the matter rested until the late 1950s when liberal reformers seeking effective alternatives to public housing began to discuss the use of rent subsidies. At a special NAHRO conference in 1958, Warren Jay Vinton and Catherine Bauer, two authors of the 1937 federal public housing law, publicly entertained the possibility of using rent certificates "to scatter problem families" and, in conjunction with other programs, provide good low-income housing. Three years later, Joseph McMurray mentioned it in his NAHB report on possible means of increasing the development of low- and moderate-income housing.²⁸

By the time Kennedy brought him to Washington to head the HHFA, Weaver had begun to consider rent subsidies as a politically viable way to expand the low-income housing program. Besides trying to make the public housing program itself more flexible, Weaver in 1961 instituted a program, the below-market-interest-rate loan program titled Section 221 (d) (3), to serve those who earned just over the limit for public housing. The same year Weaver's policy laboratory, the HHFA low-income demonstration program, began funding experiments with rent supplements by local agencies and nonprofit groups. In September 1963, Weaver gave a speech in which he announced that housing experts may well have overcome the two major reasons that reformers had opposed rent supplements in the past—that they would sustain slums and inflate rents. About this time, Weaver and his HHFA staff drafted the provision for the 1964 housing bill that allowed government bodies to help pay the rents of low- and moderate-income families and elderly individuals.²⁹

²⁷ Robert C. Wood, Oral History, interviewer David G. McComb, Oral History Collection, LBJ, 8, 11, 16; Report of the Subcommittee on Housing for Low-Income Families, The President's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs, *Recommendations on Government Housing Policies and Programs*, a Report. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 261-264, Exhibit 21, 323-330); Hilbert Fefferman, "Historical Highlights: Middle-Income Housing – Rent Supplements," typescript, March 6, 1965, in author's possession.

²⁸ "Three Views on How Public Housing Should Be Revamped," *House and Home* 14:5 (November 1958), 53; "Public Housing? 'There Must Be Better Way,' JFK Tells Builders," *House and Home* 20 (July 1961), 71.

²⁹ Housing and Home Finance Agency, Office of the Administrator, *Low-income Housing Demonstration Program: Project Directory* (Washington, D.C.: The Office, 1961); Housing and Home Finance Agency, Office of Program Policy, *Low-income Housing Demonstration, a Search for Solutions* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print.

Over the next year Weaver prepared the ground for placing rent supplements in upcoming legislation. In June 1963, Weaver arranged for a specialist from the HHFA's San Francisco regional office to work up a set of housing standards for the rent supplement program, which in September 1964 he delivered to the HHFA Administrator. In the late fall, the 1964 Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Problems issued a report that recommended briefly and in general terms that the administration start "full-scale experimentation with rent supplements." Although the chair of the task force, MIT professor Robert C. Wood, later attributed the idea of rent supplements to the task force, Weaver played "a very, very large role" in determining the task force's findings—according to the housing chief—by working through Morton Schussheim, the special assistant for program policy who represented him on the task force. In any case, as Weaver's biographer points out, in the summer of 1964 the housing chief already had submitted to the White House a list of proposals similar to the task force's agenda. About the same time, Weaver received strong support for rent supplements from the Bureau of the Budget, with whose staff he also met.³⁰

Weaver hoped that the rent supplement program would supplement and eventually replace his previous effort at housing moderate-income people through nonprofits and cooperatives—the below-market-interest-rate loan program known as Section 221 (d) (3). The Administrator would have preferred simply to expand the public housing program to include moderate-income households, those who earned too little to afford good homes but too much to qualify for public housing. This would have been the most efficient way to serve the moderate-income group, but public housing's lack of popularity made it politically impossible. Nor could Weaver apply rent supplement payments to the projects built under the below-market-interest-rate loan program because he feared Congress would reject this as a "double subsidy."

Off., 1964), 10, 14; Community Service Society of New York, Department of Public Affairs, Committee on Housing and Urban Development, *Rent Subsidies: Recommended Guidelines* (CSSNY, November 1964), 1.

³⁰ Wood credited for many of the significant recommendations to Catherine Bauer, a member of the task force who died accidentally shortly before the report was issued. If Bauer who generally favored the idea pushed it in the task force meetings, she was probably cooperating with Weaver, her long-time friend and ally. Robert C. Wood to the President, November 30, 1964; Report of the Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Problems, LBJ (listed as Outside 1964 Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Affairs), 25; Robert C. Weaver, Oral History, interviewer Joe B. Frantz, November 19, 1968, LBJ, 32 (quotation); Memo, Robert B. Pitts, Region VI San-Francisco, to Robert C. Weaver, September 8, 1964; Emil Yavno, "Proposed Rent Supplement Program, Standards for the Rehabilitation of Privately Owned and Operated Housing for Low-income Tenant Occupancy," September 8, 1964, Folder Rent Supplement, Box 136, Weaver Correspondence, RG 207, NA; Wendell E. Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City: the Life and Times of an Urban Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 256; "Major Issues in House Rent Supplement Debate," typescript and clippings from the *Congressional Record*, Chronology of Rent Supplement Issue, 1, Folder Rent Supplement, *ibid.*

Moreover, the curious accounting methods of the federal government marked the amounts of loans and loan subsidies, such as those used in Section 221 (d) (3) against the current federal budget, even though almost all the outlay would be repaid in the long run. Rent supplements, in contrast, created relatively small charges to the annual federal budget, even though they would eventually cost far more.³¹

Yet Weaver felt the government could neither afford nor achieve a large new entitlement program. The administration proposed rent supplements for the moderate-income group who could not obtain standard housing for 20 percent or less of their income. Since this still left too many eligible recipients of rental assistance, Weaver and his aides chose to help only “special members of the [moderate] income group deserving of priority treatment,” that is, the physically disabled, the elderly, those displaced by government actions (such as highway construction or urban renewal), or people living in inadequate housing. Further limiting their use, rent supplements would only be accepted in new or rebuilt buildings that nonprofit, limited dividend, or cooperative entities had developed with standard federally insured financing.³² Rent supplements, as Weaver conceived of them, were a far cry from widely used coupons like the earlier rent certificate proposals and the later and now common rental vouchers.³³

Weaver felt confident that, presented in this form, rent supplements would garner ample political support to pass the Congress. He was sure that the liberal coalition that regularly stood up for housing reform would like this moderate-income housing subsidy. The building industry would like the program, he thought, because it would raise the demand for new construction. Based on his experience with the 1964 housing bill, Weaver’s political assessment seemed reasonable enough, but it turned out to be all wrong.³⁴

³¹ Memo, Kermit Gordon, Director of Bureau of the Budget to the President, May 14, 1965, Folder 11/22/63-12/21/65, EX HS 11/22/63, Box 1, LBJ; Subject: Administration’s Housing Bill [Robert Weaver/HHFA staff], “Should Rent Supplement Payments Be Provided to Low- and Medium-Income Families to Enable Them to Occupy Standard Housing?” in Outline of 1965 Housing Message and Legislative Proposals;” Keith, *Politics*, 161.

³² [Robert Weaver/HHFA staff], “Should Rent Supplement Payments Be Provided,” 1-5, (quotations on 3, 4) in Outline of 1965 Housing Message and Legislative Proposals.

³³ The rental voucher evolved from the Section 8 program, enacted in 1974. The rental voucher program began as an experimental program in 1984 and was fully established in the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

The Interest Groups Realign

The secretive and internal process by which Weaver and his aides in conjunction with the White House staff, the Bureau of the Budget, and the task force produced the 1965 law did not allow the housing interest groups to participate and shape the law. As a result, those groups that were dissatisfied with the bill felt free to criticize it.³⁵

In addition, however narrowly conceived, the administration's rent supplement program struck several political nerves and, as Congressional hearings in March and April 1965 made apparent, realigned the usual political configuration of the housing lobbyists. As Weaver hoped, liberal groups such as the AFL-CIO, settlement workers, the National Housing Conference, and the National Council of Senior Citizens (headed by an original public houser, John W. Edelman) came out in favor of the administration's plan. And rent supplements also captured the support of some of the industry lobbies. The NAHB supported the bill, which was not surprising since the home builders had recently embraced the Section 221 (d) (3) program as a way that private industry could enter the government-subsidized low-income field, but the American Bankers Association and the Mortgage Bankers Association of America also backed the program.³⁶

But not all industry groups came on board. The die-hard opponents of public housing—such as U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association—were not impressed. If adopted, the spokesman for NAREB warned, rent supplements would eventually serve 40 percent of American households.³⁷

At the same time, perhaps because of the history of conservative sponsorship of rent certificates, rent supplements raised liberal anxieties. Many had qualms about providing further subsidies for the middle-income group when, they felt, the lowest income population was in greatest need. Housing officials, fearing that the new rent-supplement housing would compete directly with and might even replace their stock-in-trade, public housing, rejected the rent supplement program outright. Ira Robbins, the president of NAHRO and a long-time public

³⁵ Gelfand, *Nation of Cities*, 371.

³⁶ *Housing a Nation*, 74; Report of the Low-Income Housing Committee, Governmental Affairs Division, Meeting held in Chicago, Illinois on December 11, 1962, Box 03-046, Folder 3 Meeting (1962) December 10-16, NAHB; Testimony of William Blackfield before the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Housing, February 27, 1964, Box 10-020, Folder 06 (vol. 1) Subject File: Housing Legislation (1964-1965), NAHB; NAHB Policy Statement for 1965, NAHB Committee Reports, Board of Directors Meeting, Chicago, Il., December 1964, Box 03-156 Folder 4, NAHB. For example of the administration cultivating interest group support, see Night Letter, Lyndon B. Johnson to Nathaniel S. Keith, president of NHC, March 13, 1965, Folder 11/22/63-12/21/65, EX HS 11/22/63, Box 1, LBJ.

³⁷ *Housing a Nation*, 74, 80.

houser, attacked the rental payments as “administratively cumbersome and socially indefensible.” He recommended instead expanding public housing (the alternative Weaver thought was impractical).³⁸

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, which Johnson had recently placed at arm’s length so as not to be solely identified with the cause of large cities, was noticeably cool to the idea. The mayors’ spokesman, Richard J. Daley of Chicago, argued that the 1965 housing bill’s provisions for rent supplements and new towns were “unnecessary, premature, or... should be conducted on an experimental basis.” Instead, he called for more money for public housing, urban renewal, and rehabilitation.³⁹

A Call to Arms

The split within the lobby groups over rent supplements energized the housing bill’s opponents in Congress who were able to politicize it like no housing issue since the row over public housing in 1949. The battle broke out in the House, which first took up the administration’s bill, and raged throughout the spring of 1965. When the House Banking and Currency Committee issued its report on the bill on May 21, eight of eleven Republicans appended a blistering condemnation of rent supplements. They charged that the rent subsidies could easily go to middle-class families earning more than the national median income and be used for luxury apartments and that, in any case, the program would cost extraordinary sums—\$8 billion over 40 years. This “socialistic subsidy formula,” the Republicans charged, threatened the “incentive of the American family to improve its living accommodations by its own effort.” The conservatives even went so far as to exploit the liberal qualms and accused the program of threatening public housing, which has never been a concern to them before.⁴⁰

The *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock picked up the charges. In response, William A. Barrett, a congressman from Philadelphia and chair of the House Subcommittee on Housing, sent a rebuttal letter to the editor and issued a booklet refuting the “misleading and false statements” in the minority report. Although the *New York Times* editorialized twice that month in favor of rent supplements (even as it criticized the bulldozing and displacement caused

³⁸ Robbins also thought mixed private and public developments and federal rehab financing could help do the job. *Housing a Nation*, 74; Keith, *Politics*, 162; “Questions about the Rent Supplement Plan,” *Journal of Housing* 22:3 (March 1965) 127-128.

³⁹ Keith, *Politics*, 161-162; *Housing a Nation*, 79-80.

⁴⁰ *Housing a Nation*, 76.

by urban renewal), the administration confronted another public relations brush fire when columnist Rowland Evans wrote that the president was backing away from the program.⁴¹

Meanwhile, some liberals in Congress felt that they could not in good conscience give a benefit to the moderately poor while the outright poor were in need. In the Senate, which held its hearings from March 29 to April 9, Democratic senators Paul Douglas of Illinois and William Proxmire of Wisconsin pressed for turning rent supplements into a very-low-income program by lowering the eligible income limits to those of the public housing program. Douglas, a well-known but independent liberal, had grown critical of the failure of local public housing officials to build the housing the Congress had funded. Douglas thought the rent supplements program could supplement or even eventually replace public housing. Such arguments resonated in the House as well, where the committee voted to expand the eligibility to include low- as well as moderate-income tenants.⁴²

But more than anything, the race issue trumped the efforts of both the administration and the supportive lobby groups, including the influential NAHB. As Congress debated the housing bill, the attacks on civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, the national voting rights bill, and conflicts over racial integration of northern schools dominated the newspaper headlines. At the same time, Public housing became increasingly identified with poor black tenants. Once rent supplements were altered to target the low-income population, conservatives condemned the program in thinly veiled racial language. Republican Senator John Tower of Texas raised the specter of “socio-economic integration” that would “get low-income, middle-income, and high-income all living together,” and then denied he was referring to race. New York Congressman Paul A. Fino called rent supplements “a social planner’s dream” that gave “the Housing Administrator a blank check to federalize American residential patterns and subsidized forced economic integration.” Democratic Congressman Roman Pucinski, who represented a working-class white district in Chicago, objected to the lack of local governmental control over the rent

⁴¹ Arthur Krock, “In the Nation: Paying Other People’s Rent, *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*) May 27, 1965; William A. Barrett to the Editor, *NYT*, June 14, 1965; “The Housing Bill,” *NYT*, June 14, 1965; Rent Subsidy, *NYT*, June 29, 1965; Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, 89th Congress, 1st Session, *Correction of Misleading and False Statements Concerning Rent Supplement Program Made in Minority Report on the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965—H.R. 7984* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965); Memo, Robert W. Murray, Jr. HHFA Asst. Administrator (Public Affairs) to George Reedy, Asst to the Pres, June 18, 1965, Folder Dept. of HUD 11/22/63-10/29/65, Box 252, LBJ.

⁴² Keith, *Politics*, 164-165; Paul H. Douglas to Marie McGuire, April 10, 1965, Box 726, Paul H. Douglas Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois; Paul H. Douglas to Penny Weisman, June 3, 1966, Box 726, *ibid*; [HHFA], Major Issues in House Rent Supplement Debate, Chronology of Rent Supplement Issue, 1; *Housing a Nation*, 75.

supplement program—expressing fears that white communities would not have recourse from racially integrated housing projects.⁴³

Saving Rent Supplements

By June of 1965, rent supplements—this seemingly innocuous and limited program—had instigated a buzz saw of controversy that threatened Johnson’s legislative momentum in the midst of the unprecedentedly productive eighty-ninth Congress. The administration was working furiously to pass such landmark bills as the voting rights act and Medicare but now faced in rent supplements, according to the *Washington Post*, “the severest test of a Johnson-recommended program.” With politically difficult measures such as the repeal of the Taft-Hartley right-to-work provisions and immigration reform waiting in the wings, LBJ could ill afford a legislative defeat.⁴⁴

LBJ pulled out all the stops to save the rent supplement program. He deployed his political point man, Lawrence O’Brien—even though O’Brien was currently serving as Postmaster General—and, word had it, personally entreated wavering congressmen. At the HHFA, Weaver and his staff burned the telephone lines to rally the leaders of the liberal “public interest organizations,” whom they had left out of the original policy making meetings. The AFL-CIO sent its “extensive lobbying force” to work on Capitol Hill. The administration officials and lobbyists, including Nathaniel Keith of the National Housing Conference, devised ways to pressure doubtful or uncommitted congressmen directly or through constituents in their districts to vote for the bill or at least encourage them to abstain from or be absent for the final vote.⁴⁵

The campaign for rent supplements came to a climax on June 30 when the full House of Representatives took up the 1965 housing bill. Confronted with the certain prospect of defeat if the program retained its focus on the moderate-income group, the House adopted a proposal devised by Maine Senator Edward Muskie, a liberal Democrat, to reduce the eligible tenant income to below the maximum allowed in public housing. Although the amendment offered by Democrat Robert G. Stephens of Georgia passed easily, the Republicans mounted a last challenge to the entire bill by moving to recommit the bill to committee with instructions to kill

⁴³ *Housing a Nation*, 67; Oral History of Morton J. Schussheim, interview by author, Washington D.C., July 20, 2006; Keith, *Politics*, 162-163; “Major Issues in House Rent Supplement Debate,” *Local Public Control*, 8-9.

⁴⁴ Robert C. Albright, “89th Congress Prepares for Long, Hot Summer,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1965; Bernstein, *Guns or Butter*, 117-316.

⁴⁵ Keith, *Politics*, 163-164 (quotation); “Public Interest Organizations Supporting Rent Supplements,” typescript with penciled notations, Folder Rent Supplement, Box 136, NA.

the rent supplement program. By a mere six votes, 208 to 202, the House rejected the maneuver, and the full House then sent the bill to the Senate by a 245 to 169 vote. *Congressional Quarterly* called it “one of the most difficult struggles for House Democratic leaders in the 89th Congress.” Race continued to play a large role: of the 60 Democratic congressmen who opposed the bill, 52 were from the South.⁴⁶

The House vote cleared the way for approval in the Senate, but here too rent supplements faced a stiff challenge. By a 47 to 40 count, the upper chamber narrowly rejected an amendment from Senator Tower to remove the program entirely from the 1965 bill. After a debate that echoed the House arguments, on July 15 the Senate passed the bill, but only after it too restricted rent supplements to people earning public-housing levels of income. The conference committee accepted numerous minor adjustments and amendments to different programs but left the rent supplements program intact. Both houses passed the conference compromise, and on August 10 the president signed the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, calling it a breakthrough in housing policy on par with the Housing Act of 1949. “I believe,” Johnson declared in characteristically sweeping language, “this Act will become known as the most valuable housing legislation in our history...”⁴⁷

After having voted for the most valuable program in history, however, the 89th Congress eliminated operating funds for the program from its supplemental appropriations bill. Despite LBJ’s enthusiasm for rent supplements—he personally congratulated the first family to buy a home with savings accumulated through the program—in the following years rent supplements would be a thorn in the administration’s side.⁴⁸

Another fight over rent supplements broke out in October 1965 when Congress took up consideration of the annual appropriations bill. The HHFA had circulated a draft of preliminary rent supplements regulations that set a high ceiling for eligibility. The top limits were intended to include the elderly who might have a lot of money in savings but little or no earnings. Republican James Harvey seized on the proposed regulations and charged that the agency would subsidize families earning annual incomes of up to \$8,100 (a middle-class salary at the time) and

⁴⁶ “Major Issues in House Rent Supplement Debate,” Chronology of Rent Supplement Issue, 1, *Housing a Nation*, 77 (quotation)

⁴⁷ The committee added the Senate’s experimental program that set aside up to ten percent of rent supplement funds for use in housing created by the below-market-interest rate program for low- and moderate-income families and FHA mortgage insurance and FHA direct loan programs for the elderly. *Housing a Nation*, 79-86 (quotation).

⁴⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson to Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Lewis, October 11, 1965, Folder 11/22/63-12/31/66, EX HS 2 11/22/63, Box 3, LBJ.

pay most of the rent for families with \$25,000 in personal assets. Although the HHFA explained that the regulations would not apply to families, the House eliminated funding for the program from the bill. Weaver tried to rescue the program by saying that the regulations would qualify only large families or elderly recipients with \$15,000 in assets who lived in high-cost metropolitan areas. Furthermore, he argued, the agency had withdrawn the regulations and would rewrite them to cap the assets at much lower levels. The damage was done, however, and the House-Senate conference rejected the Senate's attempt to restore funding.⁴⁹

A few days later the president sent the annual HHFA report to Congress with a message that blamed "the old voices of doubt and misunderstanding" for blocking the appropriations. He declared that he would request funding for rent supplements the following year. House minority leader Gerald Ford reacted to the president's comments by repeating the charges against the HHFA of extravagant regulations. Ford blasted the law as a "pay-your-neighbor's-rent scheme" and a "radical revolutionary rent-subsidy gimmick" that would be the major issue of the 1966 election. The Housing Agency fired back that it had never issued those regulations and that the Republicans had grossly misrepresented the facts. Weaver years later attributed it to a mistake by FHA officials who he felt unable to finger publicly, but at the time he lamely blamed a printer's error for the fiasco.⁵⁰

From February through April of 1966 Weaver and the White House once again campaigned on Capitol Hill for funding for rent supplements by canvassing and making the case to legislators. Weaver, however, angered some Congressmen by suggesting that the subsidies might go to middle-income families after all. To counter the charge of extravagance, the housing agency gamely issued a fact sheet to show that the subsidy for rent supplements was \$400 less than that of public housing and thousands of dollars less than government subsidies for farmers and maritime workers.

Weaver sent the White House a gloomy assessment of the political landscape. Southerners, such as Democratic Senators Spessard Holland of Florida and Richard Russell of Georgia, opposed the rent supplement funding, even though, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey reported to the president, Senator John Sparkman of Alabama, a long-time housing program

⁴⁹ *Housing the Nation*, 86; Weaver, Frantz Oral History, 40;

⁵⁰ Gerald R. Ford, news release, October 25, 1965; Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Rent Supplements," typescript, October 26, 1965; Frank Lalli, "Weaver's Frustrating Year—Errors, Politics Mar HUD Start," *House and Home* 29:10 (October 1966), 12, 14.

supporter and stalwart Johnson loyalist, had declared in favor. I.W. Abel, president of the United Steelworkers of America and an ally who supported the program, worried that the House appropriations subcommittee had defeated the purpose of the program by giving local officials the power to approve projects. In the end, the administration only obtained half the appropriations that it had asked for, and, to add insult to injury, Congress passed the rider requiring the Department of Housing and Urban Development (successor to HHFA) to obtain the agreement of local governments for rent supplement projects.⁵¹

Politically, the going got tougher for rent supplements as time passed. The following year, 1967, saw another long battle over the housing and urban development budget for fiscal year 1968, including rent supplements and big ticket items such as Model Cities, the new comprehensive program to rebuild slums by coordinating the services and resources of diverse government and private agencies. Again the rent supplements program experienced a Perils of Pauline existence as its budget fell into peril time and again, mainly in the House where conservative opposition was strongest. The program barely survived, and in the end, the White House was forced to accept a \$10 million authorization, a quarter of what it had originally requested.⁵²

When Johnson asked in May 1967 why the House had recently rejected funding for rent supplements, his aides offered three major reasons. First, the election of 1966 replaced a large contingent of administration supporters with conservatives. It was not necessary to point out that racial fears continued to stoke opposition from the right wing. Second, the introduction of the splashy Model Cities program also hurt. The liberal alliance was united in its enthusiasm for Model Cities, but less interested in rent supplements. Finally, a general air of pessimism about the program's prospects—its lack of productivity and popularity—weighed down efforts to win votes.⁵³

With the political storms raging over it, the rent supplement program could barely get started. Lack of funds hampered it from the outset. Despite authorizing \$150 million for rent supplements for the period between 1965 and 1968, the Congress only appropriated \$42 million.

⁵¹ Phone message for LBJ from VP, April 27, 1966, Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16, LBJ; Fact sheet, "The Facts About Rent Supplement Program and Other Federal Subsidies, Folder 04/07/66-09/16/66, Box 253, LBJ; Telegram, I.W. Abel to the President, March 23, 1966, Folder Dept. of HUD 01/25/66-04/06/66, Box 252, LBJ.

⁵² *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, November 3, 1967, 2213-2214; Memo, Barefoot Sanders to Pres, October 25, 1967, Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16, Folder 8/20/67-5/8/68, LBJ. In the fall of 1967, Sanders sent Johnson a steady stream of reports on the Congress' actions on Model Cities and Rent Supplements; see Box 16, Folder 8/20/67-5/8/68.

⁵³ Memo for Marvin Watson, May 20, 1967, Folder 09/17/66-11/30/66, Box 253,

The proviso of local government approval meant the same issue that dogged public housing—the problem of finding sites that locals would accept—now afflicted rent supplements. Even with a site, the head of the Council for Christian Social Action, the charitable wing of the United Church of Christ, considered the program “unworkable.” The program required largely private financing for housing development, the head of Catholic Charities charged, was sorely lacking. The safeguards against excessive profits and design and construction regulations made sponsors feel they had been “completely smothered in red tape.” The program proceeded at a snail’s pace. In January 1967 the program had used less than a third of its \$32 million of appropriations, although with great effort the agency was able to exhaust the funds. By the end of 1967, only twelve rent supplement projects had been completed, and they contained 921 dwellings of which only 365 were slated for rent subsidies.⁵⁴

However difficult the battles, one of the most significant effects of the rent supplements program was that for the first time it brought the private housing industry groups solidly in line behind a government low-income housing program. After its passage in the fall of 1965, the realtors’ and mortgage lenders’ trade associations followed the example of the home builders and endorsed rent supplements. Hence, Weaver was able to report to the White House that representatives of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which “has seldom been in agreement with the Department, or with me” had steadfastly pushed for rent supplement funding. In return, LBJ sent a statement to the NAREB convention bestowing the nation’s gratitude on the members for their support.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ National Commission on Urban Problems, *Building the American City: Report of the National Commission on Urban Problems to the Congress and to the President of the United States*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 149 (red tape quote) -151; Lawrence J. Corcoran to the President, December 15, 1966, Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16; A. William Loos and Ray Gibbons to the President, February 21, 1967 Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16, LBJ; Memo, Joe Califano for the President January 3, 1967, Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16, Folder 8/14/66-8/20/67.

⁵⁵ “Builders and Bureaucrats Warned: Produce Rent-Aided Units—or Else,” *House and Home* 28:5 (November 1965), 5. In 1966 NAREB and the Charlotte, North Carolina real estate board lobbying North Carolina congressman Charles Jonas, the ranking Republican on the subcommittee of the House Appropriation Committee, to support rent supplements, see Robert C. Weaver to the President, February 8, 1966. Folder Dept. of HUD 01/26/66-02/24/66, Box 252, LBJ; Memo, Robert Weaver to Joseph Califano, April 26, 1967 (quotation), Folder 09/17/66-11/30/66, Box 253, LBJ; United States Committee on Banking and Currency, *Housing Legislation of 1967: Hearings Before The Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Affairs of the Committee On Banking And Currency, United States Senate: Ninetieth congress, First Session on Proposed Housing Legislation for 1967, Part 2: July 27,28 and August 7, 1967* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 1173; President Lyndon Johnson, statement to NAREB, October 12, 1967, Folder 10/13/67-01/03/68, FG 170, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Box 254.

No group worked harder or more effectively on this social legislation than did the NAHB. “We just couldn’t have done it without the homebuilders,” reflected John Barriere, the staff director for the House subcommittee, on the six vote margin in the House that saved the rent supplement program in 1965. The formidable NAHB lobbying team worked to influence some sixty congressmen, mainly southern Democrats and suburban Republicans, who the House staff thought would listen to their local home builders. Having taken the somewhat unorthodox stand for rent supplements, the NAHB went on to work for one of the most liberal of the Johnson urban programs, Model Cities. “More than words can ever measure,” LBJ wrote in a personal letter to NAHB leader Leon Weiner, “your support for the Model Cities and Rent Supplement programs has been a source of strength to me.” The housing industry, particularly the home builders, had crossed a political bridge that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier.⁵⁶

Building a Cabinet Department

The friendly attitude of the home builders paid immediate dividends in the 1965 campaign to pass the last major piece of housing legislation left from the presidency of John Kennedy. In 1961, the Kennedy administration had proposed creating a new cabinet department for urban affairs and housing to replace HHFA. Kennedy’s men had bungled the effort. They did little to stir up political support among interest groups or the citizenry and then drew battle lines that forced members of Congress to take sides on congressional prerogatives, party loyalty, and race. After much internal debate the NAHB joined a solid phalanx of industry groups in opposition. Every year after its defeat in February 1962, presidents Kennedy and Johnson submitted the proposal to no avail. Finally in 1965 the Congress passed and LBJ signed the law making the Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁵⁷

The idea to upgrade the United States housing agency to a more comprehensive and visible place in the government organization had been kicking around since the condition of cities became a matter of national concern. As early as 1942 the political scientist Charles

⁵⁶ William Lilley III, “Washington Pressures/Home Builders’ Lobbying Skills Result in Successes, ‘Good-guy Image,’” *National Journal*, February 27, 1971, 431-445, excerpted as William Lilley III, “The Homebuilders’ Lobby,” in Jon Pynoos, Robert Schafer, and Chester W. Hartman, eds. *Housing Urban America* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, second ed., 1980), 38; LBJ to Leon Weiner, November 13, 1967, Papers of LBJ GEN FA 3 8/1/68, Box 16 Folder 8/20/67-5/8/68; Bratt, *Rebuilding a Low-Income Housing Policy*, 91-92.

⁵⁷ Judith Heimlich Parris, “Congress Rejects the President’s Urban Department,” in Frederic N. Cleveland and associates, *Congress and Urban Problems; a Casebook on the Legislative Process* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1969), 173-223.

Merriam, a national expert on government and urban affairs, had proposed an urban cabinet department, and during the 1950s a few congressmen introduced bills to put urban affairs and housing into the president's cabinet. In these years, the National Housing Conference, the NAHB, the American Municipal Association, and even the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization endorsed some version of the idea.

As to what components belonged in the new governmental unit, proposals varied. Most thought the various sections of the HHFA to be logical constituents, while some would have included the Home Loan Bank Board—which used to be part of the federal housing agency—the housing division of the Veterans Administration, water pollution and sewage functions of the Public Health Service, and even civil defense. The NAHB suggested setting up a special undersecretary of housing. After considering the political angles, the Kennedy team decided essentially to reorganize the HHFA and its constituent units—such as the FHA and PHA (Public Housing Administration)—which is what they and later Johnson's people ultimately proposed.

For a number of reasons Johnson succeeded where he and Kennedy had previously failed. First and foremost, the political climate had changed. The 1964 election brought more Democrats and liberals to the Congress, and many in the country supported the president's calls for a war on poverty and the Great Society. Even so, LBJ was careful not to throw down the gauntlet as his predecessor had done. Where Kennedy had indicated that he would name Robert Weaver, a civil rights advocate as well as an African American as the cabinet secretary—precipitating a conflict in the Congress over civil rights—Johnson was careful to leave the choice open. In addition, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made the nomination of Weaver less threatening to the white representatives of the South, more of whom supported the cabinet measure than before.

A shift in the alignment of the interested groups provided another crucial element in the cabinet department victory. As before, liberal and labor organizations supported the idea, and industry groups such as NAREB and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce opposed it. The National Association of Counties, an opponent in 1961, now saw the advantage of a cabinet department that would encourage community development in suburban and rural as well as urban areas. The provision to keep the Home Loan Bank Board independent won over an old foe, the U.S. Savings and Loan League.

The most important convert, however, was the home builders association. The Johnson administration's decision to place housing first in the title of the new department—reversing the order in the Kennedy proposal—helped satisfy NAHB, as did the amendment to create a special FHA secretary that Congress adopted. Having the political muscle of NAHB pushing for rather than against the bill helped create a sense of momentum for the administration's bill on Capitol Hill. Perhaps more important in the long run, the work in favor of the new cabinet department and rent supplements signaled that NAHB officials intended to participate fully in the full range of housing policies, those pertaining to the low-income population as well as to standard commercial development.

The Tormenting of Robert Weaver

The president signed the law to create the Department of Housing and Urban Development on September 9, 1965. On his way to the ceremony, Robert Weaver appeared confident that the president would name him secretary of the new office. It would be a great personal triumph. A highly ambitious man, Weaver had begun his government career working in a racial advisory office under Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes in the Franklin Roosevelt administration. While there he had helped integrate the staff lunchroom over the protests of the white cashiers. Now, thirty-two years after he came to Washington, Weaver was about to become the first African American cabinet member in the history of the United States.

Or was he? Before he delivered his remarks at the signing event, the president signaled Weaver to his side but in his address failed to name anyone to head the new department.⁵⁸ The Department of Housing and Urban Development Act went into effect sixty days after the president signed it, which meant that, by any standard reading of the law, the president had to name a secretary or acting secretary by November 9, 1965. Yet in late October the president surprised Joseph Califano, who recounts the story in his memoir of the Johnson presidency, by telling him that he was not ready to nominate Weaver or anyone else. Before choosing somebody for this controversial job, LBJ told his aide, "he wanted to have 'his pecker in my drawer,' everything on the Hill lined up, and every person and interest group who favored the

⁵⁸ Keith, *Politics*, 166-167; Robert C. Weaver, Oral History, conducted by Morton J. Schussheim, December 19, 1985, 3; *Pioneers in Housing*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Weaver Oral History, Frantz, 5-6. For a comprehensive account of Weaver's nomination to be cabinet secretary, see Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver*, 262-278.

appointment ask him to make it.” The president then insisted that Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach reinterpret the new law to give him more time to make his decision.⁵⁹

Naturally the news shocked Weaver. Upon hearing of the Attorney General’s novel interpretation of the law, the housing deputy protested that it would be “downright humiliating” if he were not appointed at least acting secretary by November 9. Otherwise, Weaver thought that he should resign. Califano counseled patience. But upon hearing of Weaver’s threat to resign, Johnson snapped angrily that Weaver was arrogant and Califano should tell him to resign. Hoping the president would calm down, Califano did nothing. But the next morning, LBJ called his aide and insisted that he get the resignation. By then Weaver had come around to the idea of waiting, at which point Califano told him to go ahead after all and write a letter of resignation. That afternoon Califano reported to Johnson that Weaver was bringing in his resignation letter.

The president abruptly switched gears. “What the hell is he doing that for?” Johnson asked and ordered Califano to refuse to receive Weaver’s resignation. Arriving at Califano’s office, the stalwart Weaver looked “broken—his dreams of a lifetime had been shattered over the past twenty-four hours.” When told the president did not want him to resign, the emotionally stressed administrator flew into a rage but eventually took his letter back. That evening Weaver called Califano, but despite sounding “exhausted and tipsy” and thoroughly unhappy with both the president and his aide, consented to hang on.⁶⁰

Throughout November and December, Weaver endured the excruciating wait for news of his fate as the White House apparently looked for someone they considered more qualified and the national press corps speculated about who that person might be. Weaver at least at the start was determined to wait it out, and at one point after persistent questioning by the press committed the faux pas of stating that he wanted the job.⁶¹

In truth, Johnson was unenthusiastic about naming his housing deputy as the secretary of HUD. The president personally liked Weaver, but felt he was not the kind of imaginative leader the post required. Weaver’s style reinforced the president’s impression. Although in private and especially with close friends Weaver was engaging, in public he tightened up and spoke in the driest manner imaginable. He matched his dull speech with a similar official style of writing,

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: the White House Years* (York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 127.

⁶⁰ Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 129.

⁶¹ Weaver, Oral History, Frantz, 35-36.

“heavily loaded with governmentese,” according to Johnson aide Harry McPherson, who thought that owing to Weaver’s race, he was “more bureaucratic than almost any white bureaucrat.” LBJ preferred someone he considered exciting and creative, perhaps Laurence Rockefeller or Walter Reuther. If Johnson named Weaver, his aide Moyers counseled, he should surround him with “junior Goldbergs,” prestigious, young men like Arthur Goldberg, who would bring to HUD “the zeal – coupled with sound, tough executive management – of the New Deal days.”⁶²

Weaver’s political problems with Congress added to the president’s displeasure. “He doesn’t do his homework on the hill,” LBJ complained, “His [legislative] program for next year...just had to be sent back. It is just plain vanilla – about a C minus.” The uproar over rent supplements funding and the premature release of the controversial income regulations especially aggravated Johnson, who thought it the height of “political stupidity.” The White House felt Weaver was unpopular in Congress and Johnson claimed that Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield was so unhappy with the housing administrator that he would not support him as secretary.⁶³

Nonetheless, Johnson also knew that there were good reasons to choose Weaver. Because of the politics of race and his own civil rights record, LBJ felt he could not pull back from the brink of naming a black person to his cabinet. Yet at the moment he could not think of other African American candidates for HUD or how to name an African American to another post without making it obvious that the choice was based on race. Furthermore, national civil rights leaders such as Roy Wilkins, a long-time friend of Johnson, had rallied publicly to Weaver’s cause.

And there was Weaver’s undeniable expertise in housing. Robert C. Wood, the MIT professor who had chaired two administration task forces on urban policy and possessed the kind of verve that impressed Johnson, informed the president that Weaver had “done an outstanding job,” and that his experience in administering urban and housing programs was “unparalleled in this country.” Even more impressive was the backing of Texas Congressman Albert Thomas, chairman of the powerful Appropriations Committee and a native of East

⁶² Transcript, Harry McPherson Oral History Interview V, April 9, 1969, by T. H. Baker, Internet Copy, LBJ Library, 12-13, available at <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/mcpherson/mcpherhp.asp>; Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver*, 268; Memo, Bill Moyers for the President, December 11, 1965; and Harry C. McPherson, Jr. to the President, December 13, 1965, both in Folder Dept. of HUD 11/21/65-01/25/66, Box 252, LBJ.

⁶³ Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver*, 267, (quotation); Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 128. Weaver, for his part, asserted that Mansfield never indicated any displeasure with him. Weaver Oral History, Frantz, 37.

Texas, a district known for its racial intolerance. “You just stand with ole Doc Weaver,” Thomas told LBJ on the phone, “because he’s about as good a Negro I ever heard of in my life, he’s honest and he’s good and I back him.”⁶⁴

In the end, LBJ decided Weaver was not all that bad, and at any rate he had not been able to come up with a ready alternative. On January 13, 1966, Johnson called Weaver to the White House and in a hurriedly arranged ceremony at last named Weaver to be the secretary of the new department. The president rather incredibly claimed to have considered more than 300 people before fixing on the man who had been doing his housing work all along.

The ceremony also signaled that Weaver at HUD would not have the free rein he had exercised at HHFA. The president named Robert C. Wood to be Weaver’s undersecretary. The president and the White House aides wanted Wood, whom they considered a more dynamic leader than Weaver, to invigorate the administration’s urban policies. Thus, ironically, Weaver’s ascent to the pinnacle was arranged in a way designed to limit his ability to set the direction of the new department.

Although Johnson had managed to solidify outside support for Weaver in the process of naming him the first secretary of HUD, the president also revealed the cruel side of his personality. LBJ demonstrated, Califano observed, that “he could break or make Weaver – by doing both. He gave me a glimpse of a trait that sometimes drove him to crush and reshape a man before placing him in a job of enormous importance, much the way a ranch hand tames a wild horse before mounting it. To Johnson, this technique helped assure that an appointee was his alone.” The saddest part of this sorry episode was that since Weaver had always been loyal to the president, LBJ need not have humiliated him.⁶⁵

Conclusion: The End of the Beginning

The beginning of 1966 brought to a close the first phase of Robert Weaver’s official leadership of national housing and urban affairs. All the housing legislation prepared during John F. Kennedy’s presidency had been sent to Congress and, in one form or another, passed. President Lyndon Johnson presided over the passage of the 1964 housing bill, prepared before the young president was assassinated; the 1965 bill, whose most important element—rent supplements—

⁶⁴ Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver*, 275.

⁶⁵ Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 130.

Weaver had begun preparing also while Kennedy was still alive; and the housing and urban affairs cabinet legislation, which Kennedy and his men had tried and botched. In addition, Weaver ascended to the office of secretary in the new cabinet, as Kennedy had intended.

Strangely, considering their growing unpopularity, the venerable public housing and urban renewal programs had not only survived but expanded. The members of the liberal coalition knew well the flaws of public housing but wanted to reform it. The industry groups still disliked the program but came to accept its existence grudgingly, partly because of the liberal political ascendancy and partly because they could not think of any other way of providing shelter to the low-income population. Urban renewal had politically powerful sponsors—mayors and businessmen—who kept it alive, even as the political left and right questioned its validity and even morality.

Robert Weaver, a liberal housing reformer himself, endeavored to reform both programs in his own cautious way. He slowly tiptoed away from the old model of government-controlled programs by incorporating private roles in low-income housing—through such means as leasing of existing homes for public housing. At same time, he continued the liberal planning and housing agenda by trying to expand the housing subsidies to the group at the upper end of the low-income spectrum (“moderate-income”) and to specialized groups, particularly the elderly, but also rural dwellers and college students. In the 1964 bill, he successfully introduced a new special group, the handicapped, to the list of beneficiaries of federal housing programs. In urban renewal, he tried to deal with what he saw as the program’s chief problem, the dislocated.

Weaver’s major experiments did not fare well, however. His first attempt to incorporate private initiative into low-income housing, the Section 221 (d) (3) or below-market-interest-rate program enacted in 1961, was slow to produce dwelling units. Moreover, because of the government’s accounting practices, the program appeared to be quite expensive. This led Weaver to try another way to produce homes for its target population, the moderate-income group. Rent supplements for new dwellings built by nonprofits resembled the earlier program, except that subsidies went directly to tenants. But unlike Section 221 (d) (3), rent supplements raised hackles across the political spectrum. Liberals insisted that it serve very low-income people who were eligible for public housing. Then its secondary purpose—to encourage mixed-income communities—became tangled in racial politics, which gave the conservatives leverage to

deprive it of funding. Weaver's attempts to convert the program back to its original purpose through agency guidelines backfired as well.

Weaver maintained his independence from the interest groups that hovered around the Washington policymaking machinery, but this did not necessarily augur well for the housing chief's programs. Having one of their own in charge of the housing agency did not stop members of the liberal alliance from demanding dramatic increases in their favorite programs. In addition, the politically powerful mayors were upset with the agency's attempts to impose regulations—especially in regard to civil rights—on the urban renewal program and complained bitterly to the president about slow processing of their applications for grants. For their part, housing officials joined the conservative groups in opposing rent supplements, which helped undermine the program in Congress. The most significant change in old battle lines over housing policy was the conversion of the National Association of Home Builders to the side of the liberal Johnson administration. This switch helped bring along or mute other industry associations such as those of the realtors and the mortgage bankers. It proved crucial in winning the battle over a cabinet department, even if it could not overcome the opposition to funding rent supplements.

Weaver did not know it, but at the end of the first two years of Johnson's presidency, he had lost his ability to act autonomously. LBJ was not happy about the difficult political battles his housing chief had put him through. Furthermore, Weaver lacked the sort of imagination and charisma that Johnson admired in his top officials. Unable for political reasons to find anyone better suited for the job, the president settled on Weaver but at the price of demonstrating his control over his housing minister. Weaver was now LBJ's man—like so many of the president's ministers and aides.

From here on in, the impetus for new housing and urban legislation would come not from the HUD secretary but from other parts of the administration, especially ad-hoc task forces. Weaver was by no means out of the loop. It remained his job to manage and promote legislation, but LBJ would not trust Weaver to create it. Weaver could influence from inside, but LBJ would let others call the shots.

Just as importantly, the new policies in the latter years would arise not from the traditional planning and housing circles from which Weaver came but from unusual sources outside the housing field—universities, the military, corporations, even the space program. The realignment of interest groups had provided an entry for the National Association of Home

Builders to support Weaver's programs, but now the housing industry leaders would look to expand their role and write low-income housing legislation directly.

A chapter had closed, and a new one was about to begin.