

# Ben Carson Wants To Make Sure Poor People Aren't Too Comfortable

*If they get too comfy in assisted housing, he says, they won't ever want to leave.*

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Ben Carson, the secretary of Housing and Urban Development, is concerned that those who rely on the government for help with their housing aren't too comfortable.

The New York Times followed Carson as he toured housing facilities in Ohio, where he seemed very interested in the amenities residents received. During one stop, Carson noted that an apartment complex for veterans was just missing pool tables. He also simply nodded along when he learned that employees stacked bunk beds at one homeless shelter where they deliberately deny residents television.

Carson told the Times that his understanding of compassion meant not giving those who need help “a comfortable setting that would make somebody want to say: ‘I’ll just stay here. They will take care of me.’”

Carson appeared more interested in talking about the comfort level of residents than federal funding during his tour, according to the Times.

When Trisha Farmer, the CEO of a housing facility that provides support for recovering drug addicts asked Carson for federal support, he replied he wanted to incentivize “those who help themselves.” He then repeatedly asked how comfortable her facilities were letting people get, according to the Times.

About 2.2 million families depend on housing assistance from HUD through the agency’s Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher system. The average household income for families getting HUD assistance was \$13,726, according to the 2010 census data.

Before President Donald Trump nominated him to lead HUD, Carson had no experience in housing policy or government. A close friend of Carson’s had previously told The Hill that Carson didn’t want to run a federal agency because he had no experience doing so, although he eventually accepted the position.

Carson told the Times he wanted to focus on getting developers to hire low-income residents for construction projects.

Trump’s proposed budget would slash funding for HUD by more than \$6 billion. The cuts would include eliminating the Community Development Block Grant Program, which provides assistance to a number of community organizations, including Meals on Wheels.

The president has also proposed eliminating a program that helps the poor pay to heat their homes. The \$3.3 billion cut to that assistance program would save just 0.2 percent of discretionary spending.

In an interview with the Times, Carson suggested that HUD programs wouldn’t be eliminated entirely.

“I know they have been called out for elimination. My impression is that what [President Trump] is really saying is that there are problems with those programs,” Carson said. “And I think it may have been someone on his staff who kind of said, ‘Well, maybe we just need to get rid of the whole program.’ No, we don’t need to get rid of the whole program because there are some extremely good things there.”

During his confirmation hearing, Carson expressed skepticism of the very concept of helping people get housing, saying the best thing the government could do for someone getting public assistance was to get them off it.

“I see each individual as human capital that can be developed to become part of the engine that drives our nation — or, if not developed, becomes part of the load,” he said.