

Amendment #214: Military Housing Amendment

Chairman McKeon has stated that the Department of Defense must be more efficient in its spending. I couldn't agree with the Chairman more. We can no longer afford business as usual at the Department of Defense.

The focus of my amendment is on the relationship between construction contractors and those officials responsible for insuring an adequate supply of military family housing.

Our policies have put the Department of Defense in business with construction contractors as they partner in the privatization of military housing. Where the Department of Defense is a co-owner of the privatized housing companies in government contracts lasting 50 years, its objectives have shifted from providing housing in the most efficient and prudent way possible to insuring that the newly created public/private corporations are a financial success for their private partners.

One result of these distorted incentives has been the Department's abandonment of perfectly good housing currently serving military families in order to increase the flow of construction dollars and family housing allowances to the public/private housing corporations.

These are houses that have been built by private companies at government expense and maintained at government expense over the last 20 years.

Particularly where these houses are adjacent to or on our bases and built on government land, we simply cannot allow them to be abandoned.

My amendment addresses the build-to-lease Section 801 housing projects built on government land but no longer rented by the government for military families. There are currently seven military bases with such housing.

The Army at Fort Wainwright in Alaska has decided to abandon and tear down a 400 home community. These homes provide for many of the four and five bedroom housing available to larger military families in Fairbanks. The Army is under the assumption that they can have these units torn down, and eventually replaced with new housing under the privatization plan.

The government has made a substantial investment in these 801 housing projects. Future utilization of this large housing resource under conditions where the developer pays ground rent to the government and leases directly to military families could produce significant cost savings.

As the Chairman has said, we must find efficiencies and reallocate our Defense investments where they are needed most. Thousands of houses worth more than a billion dollars can be available to military families at no further expense to the government.

My proposed amendment encourages the most efficient use of funds appropriated for new and replacement housing by requiring that, to the maximum extent possible, community housing currently located on federal land under long-term lease be utilized before it is replaced with new construction of on-base housing. I believe this is necessary to save money now, and in the future. Otherwise I fear the Army will be before us soon requesting more funding for military family housing that was already available in the 801 projects.