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BIPARTISAN FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION RECOMMENDS INDEPENDENT ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity today released “**The Future of Fair Housing**,” a comprehensive report that details the findings of a six-month-long, cross-country investigation into the state of fair housing in America.

Co-chaired by two former Secretaries of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), **Henry Cisneros** and **Jack Kemp**, the bipartisan commission held public hearings in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Boston, and Atlanta. The hearings drew hundreds of housing experts and residents who testified about the pervasive nature and extent of illegal housing discrimination and its connections with government policy and practice that affect communities across the nation.

“In each of the very different cities we visited, we heard the same thing: *the system is broken*,” said Cisneros. The Fair Housing Act – the law that prohibits discrimination in housing under Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act – is not being systematically, effectively and rigorously enforced.”

The full report – available online at www.civilrights.org/publications/reports/fairhousing/ – recommends a mix of education, enforcement and policy tools, and calls for collaborative partnerships between government and private groups at the local, state, regional and federal levels. The report’s policy proposal center around the commission’s core recommendation – the need to create an independent agencies that will rigorously pursue fair housing enforcement.

“The federal government needs to be in the business of getting things done,” said Kemp. “And right now, fair housing enforcement is not getting done. That’s why we need a new, independent agency that won’t get mired in politics.”

The bipartisan commission’s findings coincide with the 40th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act.

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF), the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (LCCRUL), the NAACP Legal Defense Fund & Educational Fund (LDF), and the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) sponsored the Commission. Other commissioners include **Pat Combs**, 2007 President of the National Association of Realtors; **Okianer Christian Dark**, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the Howard University College of Law; **I. King Jordan**, President-Emeritus of Gallaudet University; **Myron Orfield**, Professor at the University of Minnesota School of Law; and **Gordon Quan**, former Mayor Pro Tem and Chair of the Housing Committee for the City of Houston.

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“The broad theme of this Commission’s report is that a comprehensive approach is necessary to help end discrimination and ensure equal housing opportunities. Fair housing is a complex issue and only through collaboration on education, outreach, enforcement and community involvement will we achieve our shared goals of strong diverse and inclusive communities.”

- Pat Combs

“Civil rights organizations have for years been warning about predatory lending and subprime mortgages that target communities of color, communities that often don’t have access to traditional lending institutions. We want to prevent this from happening again by evicting discrimination from our communities. We want a nation that is committed to integrated neighborhoods, an increase in the availability of affordable housing and a regulated lending environment in which people can borrow without sorrow.”

- **Okianer Christian Dark**

“Fair housing for everyone is at the heart of a democratic and equitable society. Yet there is still resistance to the idea that people with disabilities should be integrated within our communities, in part because of HUD’s policies and regulations that perpetuate segregated and isolating housing patterns. An independent agency would benefit people with disabilities, people of color and the nation by allowing and providing for fair housing opportunities for people with disabilities in an affordable, accessible and integrated manner.”

- **I. King Jordan**

“Fair housing is essential to our national health and prosperity. That’s why we need a regional approach to fair housing to look not just at one neighborhood but how a whole region works together. An independent fair housing agency that can look at fair housing on many levels, including the regional level, is the only way we’re going to get there.”

- **Myron Orfield**

“We need to put discriminatory housing practices under a microscope and make sure they are not only enforced but that diverse housing practices are encouraged. Our cities are stronger when our neighborhoods are diverse and inclusive. Establishing a fair housing enforcer, one that is independent from the agency funding the cities’ housing programs, will give cities the tools and incentives they need to crack down on fair housing violations.”

- **Gordon Quan**

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“For the better part of this year, the commission traveled around the country holding public hearings in Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Boston and Houston. What they found was as more disturbing than expected. The hearings drew hundreds of housing advocates and residents who testified to the pervasive nature and extent of illegal housing discrimination and its connections to government policy and practice that affect communities across the nation.”

– *Leadership Conference on Civil Rights President* **Wade Henderson**

“The findings of the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity come forty years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act and carefully detail the entrenched residential segregation and widespread housing discrimination that continue in this country. The Commission’s report cries out for a renewed commitment to fair housing and fair lending by government at all levels and by the private housing industry. I urge the new Administration to make such a renewed commitment and start by giving full consideration to the important recommendations in this report.”

– *Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law Executive Director* **Barbara Arnwine**

“In these times of economic crisis, housing issues must be at the forefront of our quest for true equality, and this important report is a critically needed review of the forces that keep our communities segregated, with devastating costs in education, employment and health care. We extend our appreciation to the commissioners and all participants in the process. The proposals for reform should be supported by all necessary players and adopted in full.”

– *NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. President and Director-Counsel* **John Payton**

“Forty years after the Fair Housing Act, the Commission has presented us with a unique opportunity to re-examine whether our government is doing all it can to advance fair housing, integration, and equal opportunity. In the context of our housing and economic crisis, the Commission’s report reflects on our government’s role in the continuing state of housing inequality and the reforms necessary to ensure its vigorous enforcement of the law so that we can move towards stable, diverse and inclusive neighborhoods.”

– *National Fair Housing Alliance President* **Shanna Smith**