

Charlotte Sun: Mahoney's senior housing bill draws bipartisan consensus

By Bob Fliss, Charlotte Business Editor

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Congressman Tim Mahoney's bill designed to maintain the supply of affordable housing for seniors passed the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously Wednesday afternoon.

H.R. 2930 will be known as the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Act. Considering the level of bipartisan support, Mahoney, D-16th District, said in a phone interview late Wednesday afternoon that he anticipates no real obstacle to passage in the Senate.

"The number of low-income seniors is dramatically rising in this country. It doesn't make sense to make political hay out of somebody's grandma or grandpa living on \$800 a month or less," Mahoney said.

Established in 1959, Section 202 is the only U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program that provides housing exclusively for seniors.

It provides loans for the construction of housing for low-income seniors, which will allow them to live independently with support services like cleaning, cooking and transportation.

H.R. 2930 changes technical provisions of the 1959 act to make it easier for private, nonprofit developers to obtain financing for senior housing. It also contains provisions that should make it easier for needy seniors to get Section 202 assistance.

Among various market-based reforms, Section 202 construction contracts will now be adjustable to compensate for fluctuations in project costs and emergencies. Utility cost spikes might be a good example.

Also, the bill would allow property owners to seek financing for upgrading and rehabilitation of existing Section 202 housing.

The bill also would authorize the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to mount a demonstration project that would sell Section 202 loans to state housing finance agencies.

Charlotte County has three Section 202 housing facilities, all in Port Charlotte: Villa San Carlos, 250 Easy St.; Villa San Carlos II, 22250 Vick St.; and Presbyterian Homes of Charlotte, 2295 Aaron St.

Mahoney announced the bill during a July 14 visit to Presbyterian Homes. It subsequently attracted 15 co-sponsors and cruised through a Sept. 25 vote in the House Financial Services Committee.

The typical Section 202 tenant is a widow who may once have had a house and a decent monthly income, but lost them when her husband died and his pension stopped, Mahoney explained.

“One day she wakes up and is trying to make it on \$800 a month in Social Security. She’s looking at health care costs, co-pays (and) property taxes, and realizes she can’t make it because she doesn’t have the money,” Mahoney said.

“I promised people that I would work in a bipartisan manner and the good news on this particular bill is that it’s a major piece of legislation that passed unanimously. It just goes to show that it can happen,” Mahoney said.