

ACORN leadership were clearly thrilled to be meeting with the Chief of Staff in the White House, just down the hall from the Oval Office. But as we left, Maude had the fortitude to let McLarty know that we looked to have a meeting with Clinton himself later on this year.

Although not as overwhelmingly positive as the Cisneros meeting, McLarty and Reed were solicitous and generally positive to ACORN input, access and involvement with the Administration. They agreed to set up meetings with us with relevant White House and agency officials in our areas of interest and expertise (housing, banking, education reform and national service). Indeed, in response to our specific proposal that they let Education Secretary Riley, Treasury Secretary Bentsen and HUD Secretary Cisneros (this was before the Cisneros meeting) know that they should designate a senior assistant to serve as liaison with ACORN in their Department. Mack said he would be seeing them at the Cabinet meeting later this week and would tell them this. (It would nice to be a fly on the wall at that meeting to see if it happens.) They told us that they were committed to "strengthening CRA;" that they would work with ACORN on community development banks, public school reform and their new national service program; that they were interested in our proposal for the White House to plan and implement a public outreach campaign on housing and/or school reform and/or community reinvestment similar to the one that they are starting this month on health care reform that has Tipper Gore and Hillary Clinton barnstorming the country; and that they were committed to placing national service program "volunteers" with community-based non-profits and not just governmental agencies. On community development banks, they expressed an interest in finding an expert to help them formulate their proposal, so Wade and I have identified a candidate with appropriate credentials that we will suggest to them. And last, Maude gave McLarty ACORN's endorsement of Elena Hanggi for appointment to the Federal Housing Finance Board, the board that runs the Federal Home Loan Bank system. He responded favorably, saying that "Elena has his support" though covering himself with the addition that "of course, the President makes the appointment."

Bottom Line: All this will take a lot of follow up, but it does seem that we will be able to get some degree of access at the White House, and apparently a solid and serious working relationship with HUD. Let's make hay while the sun shines, for it sure won't last forever.