Federal Eye - In another nod to gays, feds tackling housing bias

in another nod to gays, feds tackling housing bias

By Ed O'Keefe

In the latest example of the Obama administration extending greater rights to gays and lesbians, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is making changes to ensure they don't face discrimination when applying for federal housing assistance.

The department unveiled a series of proposed rule changes Thursday that would prohibit lenders from using sexual orientation or gender identity as a way of determining a borrower’s eligibility. In a nod to same-sex marriages and same-sex parents, the rule change would state that eligible families have the opportunity to participate in HUD-based programs regardless of marital status or sexual orientation.

The new rules, if adopted, also would prohibit owners and operators of HUD-funded housing from asking applicants or occupants of the housing about sexual orientation or gender identity.

HUD is conducting a national study on the potential impact of housing discrimination against gays and lesbians, but in its formal notice of the proposed rules cited a 2007 study of housing discrimination in Michigan that found disparate treatment of gays in 32 out of 120 fair housing tests conducted.

"This is a fundamental issue of fairness," HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan said Thursday.

The proposed rules must undergo a 60-day public comment period before formal implemented. If approved, they would join a growing list of policy and procedural changes made by federal agencies that don't require congressional approval, including gender-neutral passport application forms, changes to how the U.S. Census Bureau counts same-sex relationships and the extension of fringe benefits to the same-sex partners of gay and lesbian federal workers.

Leave your thoughts in the comments section below

- Cabinet and Staff News: President Obama shifts most of his political staff to Chicago. White House Deputy Political Director Patrick Dillon also leaving. At least five people have interviewed to replace Robert Gibbs. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan reports for jury duty. First Lady Michelle Obama recruits Wal-Mart to join her healthy foods push. White House regulatory lawyer Cass Sunstein summoned to Capitol Hill. Architects of the Gulf War reunite in Texas. Rahm Emanuel nets $10.6 million for his Chicago mayoral race.

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT: