

2972 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

I am very fond of him, and I am happy to hear he made a good impression here.

I would like to have your permission to file my statement.

Chairman PERKINS. Without objection, your statement will be filed in the record at this point, and any other supporting data you want will be inserted in the record.

(The prepared statement of Clarence Mitchell follows:)

STATEMENT OF CLARENCE MITCHELL, DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON BUREAU OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the Committee: I am Clarence Mitchell, director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP. The principal purpose of my appearance today is to express support for H.R. 8311, the Economic Opportunity Act.

The more than 2,000 delegates from 44 states who attended our national convention in Boston (July 10-15) passed the following resolution:

"This nation has at its command the basic resources to eliminate deprivation, want and hunger, and the moral and political responsibility to provide a more just distribution of income and wealth among its people. There are more than 32 million people living in abject poverty, of whom 40 percent are children under 15 years of age. While Negro citizens constitute more than ten percent of the nation's poor, and the Negro poor are 52 percent of the total Negro population, American Indians and people of Spanish and Mexican origin and poor whites also constitute a high percentage of disadvantaged poor. This condition is intolerable and inexcusable.

"The Economic Opportunity Act is a vital part of the war on poverty, and its role of marshalling resources through community action must be continued with increased and flexible funds.

"The community action program was designed to stimulate local initiative and to muster local resources in an unprecedented attack on poverty in the urban and rural communities of America. Its hallmark should be flexibility, ingenuity, and bold local leadership. It should focus on the need for fundamental administrative and political changes, responsive to the needs of the disadvantaged citizens by giving the poor an opportunity to participate and hold positions of leadership in effecting these changes. Community action provides the framework for coordinated attacks on poor education, bad housing, inadequate job skills and neglected environments. Flexibility and local decision-making are the heart of community action, and adequate Federal financial support is its life blood."

The NAACP heartily supports the program of the Office of Economic Opportunity. We do not pretend that it is perfect. We have acted and will continue to act to correct problems within the agency and in communities where the program is operative. However, we oppose any dismemberment of the agency. We are against giving the O.E.O. functions to the U.S. Department of Labor, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and others.

We are shocked by the intemperate and partisan attack made on the President this week. This is no time to play politics with human misery. President Johnson, most public officials, the NAACP and millions of Americans want peace and progress in our country. All of us condemn crime, riots and anti-social behavior. The terrible calamities that have befallen our great cities in recent days should cause the men and women of good will to be united as never before in seeking solutions. Nothing will be gained and a great deal of dangerous bitterness will be generated, if those who may disagree with the President for political or economic reasons try to buttress their arguments with appeals to base emotions and to racial prejudice.

No one can provide a simple formula for preventing riots. All will agree that demagogues who fan the flames of hate or participate in acts of violence should be dealt with sternly and swiftly in a manner approved by the United States Constitution. But we also have a duty to try with might and main to use our wealth, our brain power and our resources to correct the causes of want and despair. We must find ways to build confidence, to provide opportunities for self betterment and to lift the level of those lowest down in our country. The program of the Office of Economic Opportunity is one way of trying to accomplish this result.