

3746 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

In my judgment, there is clear and manifest need for a central planning, coordinating and energizing force in this necessarily diffuse program; and this to me is the overriding concern in reaching a decision as to the feasibility of complete operational dispersion. OEO now lends thrust, drive, focus and a point of overall surveillance to the program. Without such, the anti-poverty program would be in danger of dilution, fragmentation and wasteful competition for funds and clientele participation.

The fact that OEO does not have and cannot be accorded binding directive powers vis-a-vis the full spectrum of Federal policies and programs affecting poverty in no way lessens the requirement for an independent arm of the Executive Branch which is actively involved in a leadership role. It may well have to exercise its formal coordinating authorities with pragmatic restraint and discrimination. But I am confident this will produce a better overall result than the tenuous and detached role of the proposed Council of Economic Opportunity Advisers contemplated by H.R. 10682. Thus, as long as it is national policy to give special emphasis to this critical purpose, so long will it be necessary to have a strong central catalyst where needs, funds and programs are given an overall perspective and where there is broad capacity to innovate, evaluate, monitor, and, when necessary, administer.

Furthermore, in addition to these administrative considerations, I fear the elimination of OEO would be regarded by the country generally and by the disadvantaged particularly as a manifestation of waning interest and threatened program reduction. OEO has legitimately and effectively served as the principal voice of the poor in the councils of government. Thus, a strong OEO is essential not only for reasons of concentrated emphasis toward a discrete objective but is also highly useful as the visible symbol of a great national uplift effort.

While I have no reservations concerning the essentiality of OEO in the immediate years ahead (time may well change this), it is an open question as to how far OEO should be operational in the sense that it conducts some programs through its own facilities and resources. It can be argued that such a center should not place itself in a competitive posture vis-a-vis other agencies and other programs, but should be cast primarily in the transcendent role of planning, policy, and exercising surveillance over the total effort. In my judgment, programs should be periodically spun off from OEO following a period of precedent operation and delegated to suitable executive agencies for administration.

But such delegation or assignment of functions and programs should be essentially in the discretion of OEO as to timing and extent and should be subject to its continuing oversight to assure conformity with basic anti-poverty policies and emphases. I am specifically opposed to the mandated assignments stipulated in the substitute bill sponsored by Congressmen Quie, Goodell and others.

In summary, the interaction and inherent substantive relationship between all components of the anti-poverty program make a central focus operating within the framework of the Executive Office of the President a prerequisite of good administration by bringing unity and coherence to the nation's strategy against poverty. I, therefore, urge that OEO be retained essentially in its current status under legislative amendments now being considered.

Sincerely yours,

BERNARD L. GLADIEUX,
General Partner.

AUGUST 14, 1967.

HON. CARL D. PERKINS,
*Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor,
House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.:*

In response to your telegram of August 2, I have reviewed the comparative study of the current OEO operation and the proposed Opportunity Crusade. In addition I have spent considerable time with key members of the OEO in Washington and I have visited the Boston-Roxbury area seeing conditions at firsthand and talking to some of the people trying to deal with those conditions. With this background I considered the problem in terms of (1) performance and results of OEO work to date, (2) a current condition within the OEO and contemporary achievement, (3) the capacity of the OEO to expand and meet the growing demands of the future. I believe that the OEO, although it lacked adequate time for good planning, has done very well. Currently despite the problems of overlap with other agencies, indoctrinating and training of new staff members,