

APPENDIX 14

STATEMENT OF HOWARD M. SQUADRON ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

GUARANTEED INCOME

The American Jewish Congress welcomes this opportunity to present a statement to this Committee on the subject of Guaranteed Annual Income.

The American Jewish Congress supports the principle of a guaranteed income for all Americans, that is, a nationally financed system of cash payments to families and individuals whose incomes fall below an officially determined national standard of minimum subsistence. Although we are not committed at this time to any particular program or method of achieving this goal, we are firmly convinced that, in this era of unparalleled material abundance and economic affluence, this country can and should assure all its people a standard of living adequate to maintain health and dignity. We do not regard the guaranteed annual income as a substitute for a program of full employment and job training but we recognize that there will remain substantial numbers who cannot avail themselves of these programs or whose earnings remain substandard; and for these the guaranteed annual income is a national imperative.

INTEREST OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

The American Jewish Congress is a national organization of American Jews formed in part to protect the religious, civic, political and economic rights of Jews, to strengthen and preserve Jewish life and values and to promote and extend the ideals of American democracy. At its most recent Biennial Convention, held in Miami, Fla., from May 14-19, 1968, delegates representing American Jews in all parts of the country reaffirmed our organization's longstanding commitment to the attainment of economic justice and equality for all Americans. We regard this commitment to the disadvantaged as an integral part of the social, religious tradition of the Jewish People, a tradition which this organization seeks to preserve and extend.

The concept that it is a public responsibility to provide for the poor to enable them to live in health and dignity is central to Jewish thought.

The Pentateuch, the core document of Jewish law, proclaims that the poor have both a moral and a legal right to be supported. In fact, the Pentateuch speaks in a sense of a "guaranteed annual income" for the poor when it decrees that the poor shall receive "that which grows on the corners of the field." It is also stipulated therein that "the forgotten sheaf and fruit, the produce of the fields in every seventh year and the tithe of the harvest of every third year" belong as a matter of right to the poor.

This early Jewish tradition of legal responsibility to the less fortunate of the community has been retained intact throughout the years of Jewish history. As the agrarian economy of Judea was replaced by the mixed economy of later years, the obligation to maintain the poor was translated into money. Thus, from the taxes and voluntary contributions imposed upon the Jewish community, the resident poor were entitled under Jewish law to sufficient funds every week to defray the cost of their meals as well as additional funds to insure that they would "keep their self-respect."

The traditional Jewish attitude toward the poor which is carried on to this day is nonjudgmental. Poverty is not considered the "fault" of the poor. "It is not the bitter fruit of laziness and immorality but overtakes those who are fallen on evil days." Poverty as the Jewish mind views it is an aspect of the mystery of God adored as the God of Justice and Mercy who yet permits that "the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer" (Weiss-Marin, *The Jewish Spectator*, p. 3, June 1968). Therefore, in the Jewish tradition, the poor must be treated so as to preserve their dignity and nourish their self respect.