

11:00 to 11:20 A.M.

*Mayors*

REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT TO COMMUNITY ACTION DIRECTORS

Wednesday, March 10, 1965

*Shirley*

*Mike Sordoff  
Jack Conboy*

It may be trite to say this again, but the war against poverty is a war that is being fought in every community of the nation. It is a home-front war in every sense of the word. The Federal government will provide some funds, will run some national programs, will provide technical assistance, will evaluate and disseminate information about on-going programs -- but it is back home, in your communities, that the payoff comes.

*Your responsibility*

To put it plainly -- the monkey is on your back. Unless you develop and administer intelligent and effective programs at your level, there will be no successful war against poverty.

The Congress recognized the importance of community action when it wrote Section 612 into the Economic Opportunity Act, giving preference in all Federal programs to applications for assistance or benefits "which is made pursuant to or in connection with a community action program approved pursuant to title II of this Act."

This is a tremendous responsibility that Congress has given you and which the Office of Economic Opportunity hopes you will fulfill.

On the Federal level, we are expecting to develop the best record ever made of inter-agency cooperation in the domestic policy field.

We are seeking to take advantage of every on-going program -- to make sure that each one is focused to the extent permitted by law on the

poor of our nation. On the community level, you must see to it that

all of these programs are understood by, and utilized by and for the people for whom they were intended.

A community action program that <sup>only</sup> limits its concern to programs

authorized by the Economic Opportunity Act is a failure. All of our

programs -- Aid to Education vocational education, manpower training, juvenile

delinquency, library services, health services, and all the rest --

must be brought to bear on the basic task: eliminating the root causes

of poverty in our communities.

The concept of community action is at once both a conservative

approach -- and a radical one. It is conservative in that we are

*unified  
Joint Ec. Opportunity  
Council*

*Civil  
Rts.  
Urban  
Affairs  
School  
Alabama*

*Rural Area  
Development  
Appalachia*

*(You need in each  
community an Ec. Opportunity  
Council)*

saying that local initiative, local planning, local administration can be trusted to do the job. It is radical in that we are challenging local jurisdictions to come up with comprehensive, coordinated efforts which will take advantage of all resources, federal and state and local, private as well as public.

You will have to show imagination and ingenuity. You will also have to show great diplomacy and sensitivity -- because you will be disturbing established programs and established agencies and established institutions. As a matter of fact, you will be disturbing the Establishment!

4 In one area particularly, your imagination and your sensitivity will be challenged. That is in the area of involving the poor. The law is clear in this regard, and so is the legislative history. To the maximum feasible extent, you must bring the poor themselves into the programs. This won't be easy, but the results can be revolutionary, in the best sense of that word.

✓ You must encourage the poor to tell you what they think. That means developing channels for a new kind of dialogue in America -- a dialogue between the haves and the have-nots. You must give them opportunities to criticize -- and must learn to take it when they do.

✓ You must make them a part of your programs at every level -- including the paid staff. There are many ways in which they can serve -- and serve well. You must be prepared to receive them and make them welcome.

✓ The Government is moving on many fronts in this war on poverty.

✓ The Economic Opportunity Act is just one front. Then there is the new Education program -- the new Health program -- the new Housing program -- the new Appalachia program -- the expanded Manpower Training program. We will open up new fronts as they become necessary and feasible. In all of them, we will need your cooperation in bringing them to the communities of America and weaving them into one great attack on poverty.

You have our thanks -- and our best wishes.



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