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Arnett Resigns; Successor Picked

By Jules Witcover
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Alvin J. Arnett submitted his resignation on request yesterday as director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, telling President Nixon in a letter he was leaving regretfully, "with very mixed emotions."

The President, in San Clemente, immediately announced his intention to appoint Bert Gallegos, OEO general counsel, as director of the federal anti-poverty agency, which has been given a congressional lease on life to Sept. 30 while efforts go forward to switch key elements to other departments. Arnett's resignation is to be effective July 31.

Fired on grounds he actively lobbied against the President's desire to kill off the anti-poverty agency, Arnett nevertheless expressed hope "that my departure in some small way serves to remove any obstacle to the wholesome workings of the governmental process in behalf of disadvantaged people."

The Nixon administration has made clear, however, that Arnett's departure was required to remove an obstacle to the speedy dismantling of the few functions of OEO not already terminated or shifted to other agencies. White House deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said in San Clemente Arnett was removed as a result of "irreconcilable differences."

Arnett was the spearhead of an effort to win congressional approval of a shift of OEO's community action programs to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. A bill to that effect passed the House

overwhelmingly in May, by a margin large enough to override a threatened veto by Mr. Nixon.

Howard J. Phillips, Arnett's predecessor at OEO who aggressively sought to carry out the dismantling last year, charged yesterday that Arnett's firing was timed as a sop to conservatives on Capitol Hill to offset creation of a Legal Services Corporation.

"They were saving Arnett for this week so that when the President signed the legal services bill he could throw the conservatives—a bone," Phillips, an outspoken voice among Republican conservatives, said.

A major target of conservatives has been the so-called legal services back-up centers, where the poor could go for legal aid. A compromise striking provision for the centers from the legislation is being sought on Capitol Hill. In San Clemente, Warren said that with their removal, "the chances of the President signing would be greatly enhanced."

Sen Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) said yesterday the action against Arnett demonstrated the need for a "separate agency for the poor outside of the White House and outside of existing programs." He and three other senators—Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and J. Bennett Johnson Jr. (D-La.)—are planning to sponsor legislation for such an agency, Javits said.

Kennedy said Arnett's firing "reflects the administration's continuing lack of concern for the nation's 23 million poor."