

Black Coalition Attacks Law Enforcement Fund

By Ken W. Clawson
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights yesterday accused the Nixon administration of subsidizing racial discrimination by granting millions of dollars in law enforcement funds to states and localities without regard to equal employment practices.

Charges by Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP and chairman of the leadership conference, the nation's largest civil rights coalition, that the Justice Department's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration places a low priority on civil rights matters drew an immediate response from the government.

"It's not true," said Jerris Leonard, LEAA administrator and former chief of the Justice Department's civil rights division. "Civil rights priority is not the lowest — it's one of the highest."

Almost simultaneous with Wilkins' charges, Attorney General John N. Mitchell announced that 21 federal agencies have proposed regulations to beef up federal prohibitions against racial discrimination in federally assisted programs.

A Justice Department spokesman said it was "sheer coincidence" that the proposed regulations were published in the Federal Register on the same day as the coalition's attack.

Wilkins said that LEAA is granting more than \$1 billion a year to police, courts and prisons on the state and local level without any assurances that recipients are correcting inequities in hiring and promotion practices.

He pointed out that in Mississippi, for example, LEAA has granted more than \$250,000 to the Mississippi Highway Patrol, which does not have a single black patrolman despite the fact that the state is 44 per cent black.

Wilkins criticized LEAA for refusing to cut off funds to states that refuse to protect job opportunities for minorities and women.

The coalition petitioned the Justice Department for a hearing for a change in regulations, contending that the anti-crime agency's present rules fail to satisfy a constitutional duty to avoid subsidizing racial discrimination.

A few hours after Wilkins' news conference, Leonard

called one of his own to denounce the civil rights leader for engaging in "blatant exaggeration."

Leonard said there was no contact with LEAA before the accusations to "get the facts," pointing out that LEAA is granting about \$700 million a year—not more than \$1 billion as Wilkins charged.

The LEAA administrator also said that he "questions the motives" of the coalition because Wilkins, with the television cameras grinding, departed from his initial criticism of LEAA to call the possible confirmation of William Rehnquist for the Supreme Court a "disaster" and to say that Rehnquist was "poison" for the nation.

Leonard said that LEAA is prohibited by legislation to require states and localities to initiate a program to overcome racial imbalance, but he acknowledged that it can require an affirmative action program.

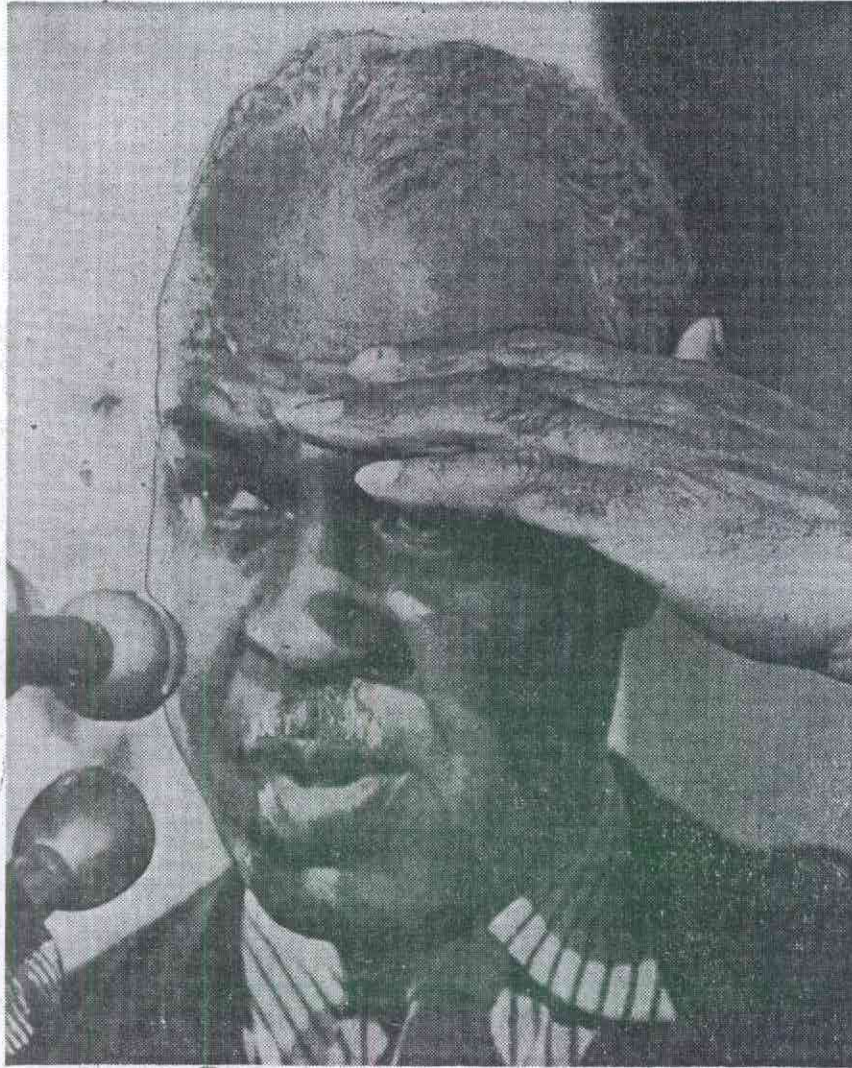
But he said the core of Wilkins' argument was the criticism that the Nixon administration refuses to use the fund cutoff method of obtaining civil rights compliance.

This issue was first raised during the school desegregation effort in the South when the Nixon enforcers took their discrimination allegations to court instead of taking administrative action, such as cutting off of federal money.

"Philosophically, I don't believe in the fund cutoff method," Leonard said.

He said that minorities would be hurt more than helped of anti-crime funds were curtailed because of discrimination complaints. "Minorities are the greatest victims of street crime, and programs to eliminate street crime would be stopped if federal monies were cut off," he said.

He pointed out that the government had joined with persons in Mississippi who allege that the state agency receiving federal anti-crime funds has no black representation. He said LEAA expected the court ruling in that case to produce



Associated Press

Roy Wilkins tells newsmen yesterday that the Justice Department is subsidizing racial discrimination through law enforcement grants to states and localities.

an action plan that would lead to blacks serving as highway patrolmen.

Leonard said it was interesting that Wilkins would single out Mississippi. He pointed out that Massachusetts, "that great liberal state," has no black state policemen.

Industrial Michigan, he added, has only six black state policemen out of about 1,800.

The regulations published yesterday by the government would accomplish some things sought by the civil rights groups. One would require any recipient of federal funds

who has discriminated on the basis of race, color or national origin to take affirmative action to correct the effects of discrimination. Another would prohibit selecting the site for a new facility with the purpose or effect of excluding minorities.