

Excerpts From O. E. O. Veto Message

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 9—Following are excerpts from the text of President Nixon's veto message to the Senate on the Office of Economic Opportunity bill:

This legislation undertakes three major Federal commitments in the field of social welfare: extension of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, creation of a National Legal Services Corporation, and establishment of a comprehensive child development program.

As currently drafted, all three proposals contain provisions that would ill serve the stated objectives of this legislation, provisions altogether unacceptable to this Administration.

Upon taking office, this Administration sought to redesign, to redirect—indeed, to rehabilitate—the Office of Economic Opportunity, which had lost much public acceptance in the five years since its inception. Our objective has been to provide this agency with a new purpose and a new role.

Primary O.E.O. Goal

Our goal has been to make the Office of Economic Opportunity the primary research and development arm of the nation's and the Government's on-going effort to diminish and eventually eliminate poverty in the United States. Despite occasional setbacks, considerable progress has been made.

That progress is now jeopardized. Too ill-advised and restrictive amendments contained in this bill would vitiate our efforts and turn back the clock.

In the 1964 Act the President was granted authority to delegate—by executive action—programs of O.E.O. to other departments of the Government. That flexibility has enabled this Administration to shift tried and proven programs out of O.E.O. to other agencies—so that O.E.O. can concentrate its resources and talents on generating and testing new ideas, new programs and new policies to assist the remaining poor in the United States.

This flexibility, however, would be taken away under amendments added by the Congress—and the President would be prohibited from

spinning off successful and continuing program to the service agencies.

If this Congressional action were allowed to stand, O.E.O. would become an operational agency, diluting its special role as incubator and tester of ideas and pioneer for social programs.

Mandatory Funding Levels

Secondly, the Congress has written into the O.E.O. legislation an itemized list of mandatory funding levels for 15 categorical programs.

Should these amendments become law, O.E.O.'s days as the principal pioneer of the nation's effort to combat poverty would be numbered: O.E.O. would rapidly degenerate into just another ossified bureaucracy. Even if O.E.O. legislation were to come separately to my desk, containing these provisions, I would be compelled to veto it as inconsistent with the best interest of America's poor. I urge the Congress to remove these restrictions.

The provision creating the National Legal Services Corporation differs crucially from the proposal originally put forth by this Administration. Our intention was to create a legal services corporation, to aid the poor, that was independent and free of politics, yet contained built-in safeguards to assure its operation in a responsible manner.

In the Congress, however, the legislation has been substantially altered, so that the quintessential principle of accountability has been lost.

In re-writing our original proposal, the door has been left wide open to those abuses which have cost one antipoverty program after another its public enthusiasm and public support.

Affront on Accountability

The restrictions which the Congress has imposed upon the President in the selection of directors of a Corporation is also an affront to the principle of accountability to the American people as whole.

To compound the problem of accountability, Congress has further proposed that during the crucial 90-day period—when the corporation is set into motion—its governance is to rest exclu-

sively in the hands of designees of five private interest groups. That proposal should be dropped.

It would be better to have no legal services corporation than one so irresponsibly structured. I urge the Congress to re-write this bill, to create a new National Legal Services Corporation, truly independent of political influences, containing strict safeguards against the kind of abuses certain to erode public support—a legal services corporation which places the needs of low-income clients first, before the political concerns of either legal service attorneys or elected officials.

But the most deeply flawed provision of this legislation is Title V, "Child Development Programs."

Adopted as an amendment to the O.E.O. legislation, this program points far beyond what this Administration envisioned when it made a "national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for a healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life."

Flaws in Child Care Plans

Though Title V's stated purpose, "to provide every child for a full and fair opportunity to reach his full potential" is certainly laudable, the intent of Title V is overshadowed by the fiscal irresponsibility, administrative unworkability, and family-weakening implications of the system it envisions. We owe our children something more than good intentions.

Specifically, these are my present objections to the proposed child development program:

First, neither the immediate need nor the desirability of a national child development program of character has been demonstrated.

Secondly, day-care centers to provide for the children of the poor so that their parents can leave the welfare rolls to go on the payrolls of the nation, are already provided for in H.R.I. my work fair legislation. To some degree, child development centers are a duplication of these efforts. Further, these child development programs would

be redundant in that they duplicate many existing and growing Federal, state and local efforts to provide social, medical, nutritional and education services to the very young.

Third, given the limited resources of the Federal budget, and the growing demands upon the Federal taxpayer, the expenditure of \$2-billion in a program whose effectiveness has yet to be demonstrated cannot be justified. And the prospect of costs which could eventually reach \$20-billion annually is even more unreasonable.

Family Goal in Jeopardy

Fourth, for more than two years this Administration has been working for the enactment of welfare reform, one of the objectives of which is to bring the family together. This child development program appears to move in precisely the opposite direction.

Fifth, all other factors being equal, good public policy requires that we enhance rather than diminish both parental authority and parental involvement with children—particularly in those decisive early years when social attitudes and a conscience are formed and religious and moral principles are first inculcated.

Sixth, there has yet to be an adequate answer provided to the crucial question of who the qualified people are, and where they would come from, to staff the child development centers.

Seventh, as currently written, the legislation would create, ex nihilo, a new army of bureaucrats.

Eight, the states would be relegated to an insignificant role.

Ninth, for the Federal Government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against the family-centered approach.

This President, this Government, is unwilling to take that step. With this message, I urge the Congress to act now to pass the O.E.O. extension and to create the Legal Services Corporation along the lines proposed in our original legislation.