

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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MEMORANDUM FROM BERTRAND M. HARDING
ACTING DIRECTOR

I'm sure that by now you have all seen news reports on the President's long-awaited statement regarding the future of the Office of Economic Opportunity. I believe all of us at OEO, the operators of our programs in the field, our supporters among the general public and most of all the poor whom we seek to serve should be gratified at the course charted by the Administration's newly announced anti-poverty policy.

President Nixon's statement to Congress of February 19 represents in every important aspect an endorsement of much of the work OEO has done over the past 4 years. But, of even greater significance, is the President's recognition that a major effort still lies ahead to redeem the lives and hopes of America's poor. As the President put it:

"From the experience of OEO, we have learned the value of having in the Federal Government an agency whose special concern is the poor. We have learned the need for flexibility, responsiveness, and continuing innovation. We have learned the need for management effectiveness."

As I see it the key points in the President's message are these:

1. OEO will continue, under that name and within the Executive Office of the President. The President will propose to Congress that OEO's authorization for appropriations be extended for one year to June 30, 1970.
2. Later this year, the President will send to Congress a "comprehensive proposal for the future of the poverty program" which he will propose to become effective July 1, 1970.

3. Head Start will be delegated to the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, effective July 1, 1969.
4. Job Corps will be delegated to the Department of Labor effective July 1, 1969, with the Departments of Interior and Agriculture retaining operating responsibility for conservation centers.
5. Preparations will be made for the eventual transfer of the Comprehensive Health Centers and Foster Grandparents programs to HEW.
6. The "vital" Community Action Program will be pressed forward, and CAAs will continue to be involved in the operation of programs at the local level, even though such programs may be delegated to other Departments at the national level.

There will, of course, be difficulties as we seek to carry out the administrative changes the President wishes, as Congress performs its legislative duties and even as we at OEO meet our continuing responsibilities to the poor. These, however, are difficulties inherent in the transition process, rather than difficulties of substance affecting the continuation of programs and their impact on the poor. As such they are difficulties I am confident can be effectively resolved.

The overriding question for the past few months has been the continuation of OEO's mandate to help the poor out of poverty. That mandate is now in hand and I think all of us concerned with the plight of America's poor are heartened and ready to push forward our common cause.

During the past four years OEO has made major strides toward erasing poverty. But some 22 million poor remain with us, so there is much still to be done. In essence we now have the Presidential support to get on with the job.

Bertrand R. Harding