

Statement by J. Irwin Miller, President, Cummins Engine Company
and Member, Policy Council, Urban Coalition Action Council
before the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty
Committee on Labor and Public Welfare
U.S. Senate
April 23, 1969

Mr. Chairman:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear with Mr. Gardner on behalf of the Urban Coalition Action Council in support of extension and adequate funding of the Economic Opportunity Act. I endorse Mr. Gardner's statement, particularly his conclusions and proposed Congressional action.

There are two points made by Mr. Gardner to which I wish to call special attention. The first concerns the fact that we -- business, labor, mayors, religion, minority and civic groups -- represent a broad-based national coalition of normally divergent interests. The Urban Coalition Action Council was formed because of our concern with the future of this increasingly urbanized society, and the legislation needed to meet the challenges of such a society. The Economic Opportunity Act is one of the legislative tools meeting those challenges. Notwithstanding our diversity of views on many issues we recognize the role the Economic Opportunity Act has played not only in materially improving, but in giving substance to the lives of many of the poor and disadvantaged citizens in our society. There should be no thought given to cutting back, retrenching or limiting the assistance the Federal government can provide through legislation such as this. Instead, the Federal government should be genuinely concerned to make certain the funding is enough to do the job within reasonable time.

The second point I wish to make, and again one Mr. Gardner developed in his testimony, concerns the role of community action in the overall antipoverty effort. It seems to me essential that the Congress give full support in this problem to local community involvement. The poor and disadvantaged are more concerned today than ever before in gaining an effective role in determining their own destiny. They no longer see themselves as helpless and powerless before the unyielding and unchanging institutional forces of our society. They now have a direct and significant impact on these institutions. Although not all view this impact in the same way, I personally believe that greater involvement by the disadvantaged in social action programs is necessary, and that results to date have been favorable. Expansion of this concept should be encouraged. There is also no question in my mind but that community action programs, fostered and nurtured by community action agencies, will turn out to have been the forerunners of a much wider range of community involvement by the poor. For this we have the Economic Opportunity Act largely to thank.

I join Mr. Gardner in urging Congress to continue its support of this legislation by giving it not only the extended life it deserves, but the funds, in the form of appropriations, it needs to prosper.