

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY

OPENING STATEMENT TO PRESS CONFERENCE ON JUNE 7, 1968,

BY WILLIAM W. SUTTLE, REGIONAL DIRECTOR,

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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I am pleased that a compassionate and concerned federal government has given me the OPPORTUNITY to ask you here this morning at the time of my appointment as Regional Director, Southeastern Region, Office of Economic Opportunity.

I am extremely sorry that our meeting comes at a time when the America we love is once again beneath a tragic cloud of grief, occasioned by the senseless slaying of another great patriot. Almost as shocking as the death of Senator Kennedy is the dramatic realization that the kind of violence that he abhorred is no longer uncommon in our land. We all mourn his passing and pray for continued Divine strength for his bereaved family. Most important, however, we must renew our determination that the late Senator Kennedy's dream of a better America, where all men may live together as equals and in peace, shall not die with him.

As though it were Buckingham Palace, it might appear that during the past several months the most exciting news to come from this office has revolved around the "changing of the guard." Although this is one tradition that I sincerely hope we can break, let me assure you that much, much more has transpired within these walls than the frequent change of leadership would indicate. During the twelve weeks that I have been in Atlanta as the Acting Director, I have seen a devoted and capable staff refuse to succumb to the pressures of being undermanned and accept the OPPORTUNITY to serve the poor of our six states in an enthusiastic manner that makes me proud to become one of them.

Community Action Agency grant processing is further along today than at any similar time since regionalization of this Agency, and Head Start grant refusals have dipped to only seven within the Region compared to more than thirty a year ago. Hard work on the part of the Atlanta OEO staff has made these things possible in spite of the lateness of funding for the current fiscal year, the recent Emergency Food and Medical program that cast the bulk of its work-load on this



Region, and the necessity of advising with every local agency on the changes necessary to comply with sweeping amendments made last year to the Economic OPPORTUNITY Act of 1964.

The Job Corps staff in the Southeastern Region continues to recruit and transport more than one fourth of all the youngsters enrolled in this very excellent human renewal program, and they continually lead all other regions in this vital area of activity.

318 VISTA volunteers work around the clock, seven days each week in thirty-six projects throughout five states in the Region, living among the poor and helping them to find better ways to utilize the resources available to them. 150 more will be assigned to training centers during this summer. While these valliant men and women devote full time to eradicating the hunger, ignorance, disease, prejudice and deprivation that is poverty in America, they typify that the concept of volunteerism is just as much alive in this land today as when DeToqueville wrote about it a century ago.

The fiscal records in this office are, in my opinion, excellent and comparable to those of any other Federal regional operation in the country. Personnel procedures here are being improved and increased to devote more effort to recruiting, training and career development.

From the record I am sure you will agree that there is much that is good and excellent within this operation. Certainly, all is far from bad, and as a new Regional Director there is much for which I can be thankful and proud.

However, accomplishments of the past are far from sufficient, and the challenges of the future have always been -- and will certainly continue to be -- the beacon that guides this Region and this Agency.

I hope you have noticed from the foregoing lines of this statement and from the surroundings here this morning that, to insure that this Region keeps our goals clearly before us in the months ahead, the accent will be on OPPORTUNITY. ACTION, not promises, will be our objective. RESULTS, not excuses, must be the products of our efforts.

The Vice President of the United States, speaking last January to the Congress of America's Ten Outstanding Young Men, said:

"Somebody in Washington can't do it (win the War Against Poverty alone), and even if he could, he shouldn't."

With these words, Mr. Humphrey told his audience that the fights against "hopelessness and despair" are local battles, and that until every concerned and socially conscious citizen is given the OPPORTUNITY to engage the enemy at the community level the war cannot be won.



No one could agree more completely with the Vice President than I do. In framing the Economic OPPORTUNITY Act of 1964, the Congress directed this Agency to mobilize all available resources in the War Against Poverty. My first introduction to the government service came as a result of a plea that all who wished to serve might be given the OPPORTUNITY to meet the challenges facing America today. It is my hope that all who are associated with programs within the jurisdiction of this regional office will accept the challenge of total resource mobilization in every community we serve, as well as being effective advocates for all the poor.

Recent public opinion polls show that a majority of Americans, regardless of political persuasion, support national programs to stamp out hard-core unemployment and to rebuild our slums. This Agency must see that every one of these concerned Americans has the OPPORTUNITY to become a part of the solutions to our social problems.

Every businessman and employer must be given the OPPORTUNITY to help place the poor into the mainstream of economic society by providing jobs for the hard-core unemployed. Already, through efforts of the National Alliance of Business, large employers in major cities have shown their willingness to meet this challenge. We must extend that same OPPORTUNITY to every community where there are unemployed poor.

Every church and other religious group must be pointed toward the local mission field and made aware that Christmas baskets for the needy are far from enough. There are more than twenty million Americans, created in His image, who need the total resources of the church to assure that their future will not be limited by lack of OPPORTUNITY. We have already begun to call on religious leaders throughout the Region to stimulate greater church involvement in social programs, and their initial response has been gratifying.

Every civic, service organization must be challenged to turn from trivial traditional projects to programs that truly serve that community and the disadvantaged. The Atlanta Jaycees have shown what can be done by volunteer groups with their Neighborhood Center and related activity. I will ask these young men to travel throughout this region to stimulate similar endeavors by every civic organization that is willing to listen.

The public must be made aware of the problems of our society and of the need for total participation in the solutions. In many instances the hearts and minds of men must be changed. We can no longer afford to have the masses confuse OPPORTUNITY with the dole, to believe that being poor is synonymous with being lazy, or to think that to be different is to be second-class.

The President's Commission on Civil Disorders has stated "there can be no higher priority for national action and no higher claim on the nation's conscience" than "a compassionate, massive and sustained" attack on the problems of deprivation in our society. I fully concur, and I have



faith in America to continue to create OPPORTUNITIES from problems and challenges. I have faith in the ability of this Agency to stimulate the kind of massive effort that is necessary, and I am happy to have the OPPORTUNITY to be a part of what President Johnson described in his State of the Union Address as a "time to know the pride and excitement and hope of being an American."