

INTERVIEWEE: BERTRAND HARDING (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: STEVE GOODELL

November 20, 1968

G: This tape will be an interview between Stephen Goodell working for the Oral History Project for President Johnson's Library and Mr. Bertrand Harding, the Acting Director for the Office of Economic Opportunity; the time is 2:30 on Wednesday, November 20, 1968.

Mr. Harding, perhaps I should start out by asking how you first became acquainted with President Johnson.

H: Well, the first personal contact that I had with President Johnson was in probably 1963 while I was at the Internal Revenue Service. We were involved in a very difficult situation with Senator McNamara regarding a facility that we had proposed to put into the city of Detroit, and Mr. Mortimer Caplan, the then Commissioner of Internal Revenue, Mr. B. Frank White, the Regional Commissioner in Dallas who was a personal acquaintance of the then Vice President, and I called on the Vice President to discuss this particular problem with him and get his advice.

G: And to what extent did Mr. Johnson involve himself in this?

H: Well, it was really his meeting in terms of our laying out the problem and requesting his assistance in how we could get out of the difficult situation with Senator McNamara.

An interesting footnote to that first contact with the then-- Vice President is that the man who now serves as the Deputy Director of this agency, Mr. Bob Perrin, was at that time Senator McNamara's administrative assistant and my chief adversary in this particular

encounter.

G: And the relationship has changed since then?

H: And the relationship is much better now than it was in those days.

G: Could you describe the circumstances surrounding your appointment as Deputy Director to Mr. Shriver in the Office of Economic Opportunity?

H: Yes. It started really in February of 1966 when I was the Deputy Commissioner of Internal Revenue. I received a call from the then Director of the Bureau of the Budget Mr. Charlie Schultz who told me that there was some problems over at OEO, and that he and John Macy, the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, had decided that I was perhaps the best qualified person around to do a management survey of OEO and to make recommendations for changes in the organization, management procedures and so forth.

I entered on this project then as I recall some time in February of that year. Towards the late spring or early summer as the project was about at its conclusion, I discovered by a personal conversation with the then Deputy Director of OEO, Mr. Bernie Boutin that Mr. Boutin was extremely unhappy in his job with OEO and was determined to leave. He had apparently discussed this with the President and others, and had been given the assignment to find a successor. And depending upon finding that person, he would or would not be able to leave his present job. Well, Mr. Boutin approached me at lunch one day about the possibility of taking over his job. I was extremely hesitant about that, being a career employee and moving into the political realm, and I thought about it for some period of time. I was called by John Macy to discuss it and by Schultz, as I recall; and then ultimately by Shriver. Shriver in effect offered me the

job and stated that he was aware of the fact that he had a reputation for gobbling up deputies, but that in fact he thought he was a pretty reasonable individual, and asked me to go over and talk to Bill Moyers who had served as his deputy in the Peace Corps.

So I went to talk to Moyers and I'll never forget Moyers' view, and that was that Shriver was a reasonable person to work for, but there was only one consideration, and that was you could never become indebted to him or in any way dependent upon him; that if you were prepared each day as you went into the job to leave immediately that you'd get along very well with Sarge, but if you ever got in his clutches, as it were, that you were in sad shape. So after much consideration and soul-searching that went over several weeks, I decided that I would take the plunge, and it was subsequent to that that I had my first really personal face-to-face conversation with the President.

G: Could I bring you back to Mr. Boutin as Deputy Director? What were the specific problems that he had faced which made him want to resign?

H: Well, in the first place he was terribly frustrated by the organization and by the people who worked in OEO; they were difficult to manage. They were continuously going off in their own private directions with their own private agendas. And Bernie was a very straight-laced sort of a guy. And it was a distressing experience for him within the organization. He had I think very little acceptance within the organization generally; there were a few who thought very highly of him, but there were many, particularly in the program areas, in Job Corps and VISTA and CAP, that did not get along well with him,

so he had internal problems. And then he had problems in his relationship with Sarge. He was very close to Sarge, had been prior to his coming into the agency, but somehow or another that particular bit of chemistry didn't seem to work. So he felt left out in many instances, and Sarge was doing things without consultation, without his involvement. He also was encountering difficulties with Mrs. Shriver and as he described it to me, Eunice was constantly trying to get Bernie to get Sarge to do particular things, and Bernie had very little influence, and yet he was being bugged from the sidelines. And he felt caught up in a triangle not of his own making and one in which he was very uncomfortable. So he was not at all happy with the whole situation and wanted to get out.

G: What was your knowledge of OEO at the time that you were approached?

H: Well, my knowledge was relatively good at the time I was approached because I had then been working on the management survey for a period of two or three months. So I knew all of the key people, I knew generally what the programs were about, I knew what the problems were generally. I certainly would not have considered myself an expert, but I knew a great deal more about it when I was approached in--that was in early June, I guess, May or June, than I did when I first got there.

G: Did that survey--it came up as I recall, about sixty recommendations for management changes or administration changes--

H: Yes, something in that neighborhood.

G: Since you have been Acting Director, have administrative improvements based on those recommendations been made?

H: I think the answer to that is that all of the recommendations that

were feasible, that turned out to be viable, were carried out between the time that I came in as Deputy Director and the time that I became Acting Director. So in terms of my present capacity as Acting Director the management survey is really quite passé. We did, and one of my main activities as the Deputy Director was to try to carry out most, if not all of the recommendations, that we made as part of the management survey team. But by the time I became Acting Director this year, that really had all been taken care of--everything that could be taken care of.

G: You were appointed Deputy Director in June of 1966.

H: Yes.

G: Did you have any contact with the President then?

H: I had an immediate meeting with him prior to that announcement, yes.

G: Could you say what happened at that meeting?

H: Well, I got a lecture from the President. My recollection of that meeting is that I said, "Hello, Mr. President," and "Goodbye, Mr. President." And, that for the intervening twelve-fifteen minutes the President talked. We met in a little side office just off of his main office, just the two of us. About halfway through the conversation, Bill Moyers joined us, obviously trying to push the President along; I guess he was running late in his schedule or something. And he came in more as an irritant than as a participant. As a matter of fact, he said nothing at all. And the President talked to me about his problems with the OEO; he talked to me about the past, about his early days with NYA; he really--it became clear to me that his view of the poverty program was pretty much an extension

of his earlier experience with the New Deal--the early days of the New Deal and the National Youth Administration; that he was very cool, if not opposed, to some of the more way-out activities that had characterized OEO.

G: Would this have been in Community Action?

H: Primarily, yes.

G: Let me just turn to that program for a moment; we'll come back to this. Two questions come to my mind. It's my understanding that President Johnson knew in 1964 the potentiality of the Community Action Program, the primary question in his mind at that time was was it the right thing to do, was it right for the act? Could you comment on that?

H: I'm not sure I understand exactly what you're trying to get at.

G: Let me come back to that. Let me just ask you--what was it specifically that he was dissatisfied with about either Community Action or some of the other programs that he talked to you about in that meeting?

H: I think it's the sort of thing that any politician would be dissatisfied with. There was an awful lot of negative stuff in the paper, minor frauds, and employment of people with questionable backgrounds, militants who became associated with the program in one way or the other, and that association developed adverse commentary--editorial commentary in large part about the program; waste, sort of way-out do-nothing activities particularly in Community Action.

G: Did he make any recommendations to you then?

H: Well, I wouldn't call them recommendations; he let his views be known, and he asked me to lend every effort to see to it that things became somewhat more rational in his view of life.

G: What I was getting at in that particular question was the full knowledge of what Community Action could become and whether the President had a full understanding of it; and if so, he was prepared to deal with the consequences politically.

H: I frankly don't believe that the President foresaw Community Action developing in the manner in which it developed. Pat Moynihan has pointed out that there were at least three objectives and really quite mutually exclusive for people who advocated Community Action. I don't recall precisely how he titled the three, but I do recall that the one which he labeled the "Bureau of the Budget position" was that Community Action was really a device for achieving administrative coordination of programs at the local level--federal programs at the local level. And this of course is a reasonable objective and one consistent with Community Action. It's not actually the way that it turned out to be, but it could have been an objective.

It would be my guess that at the most the President viewed Community Action as having that sort of thrust, because I don't believe that he would have been interested in a federal program which essentially had a lot of anti-city hall, tear down the ramparts sort of attitude to it. And Community Action has a lot of that in it. So I don't just really believe--and I'm not criticizing the President's perception in that; I'm not sure that anybody at that point in time had a clear view of exactly where we were coming out at the end of the horn.

G: In 1966 what was your own understanding of Community Action when you came on as Deputy Director?

- H: Well, I think by that time I understood its multifaceted aspects, because I had read a lot and I had talked to a lot of people. So I think I had a fairly clear view of the different perceptions of it, its potentials, its dangers, its inherent conflict, because I had really had to study the thing in connection with the survey.
- G: Did you assist in the construction of the legislation in 1967 which imposed certain limitations on--?
- H: Not really, Shriver and I had sort of a beginning understanding that I was to be Mr. Inside and he was to be Mr. Outside; I took care of internal matters involving personnel, budget, and management systems and so forth, and Sarge was the guy who worked the Hill. And of course working the Hill primarily involved, at that time, the '67 legislation.
- G: Which was the key, more critical year for OEO.
- H: That's right. That was really the key year. I was involved in staff meetings of a general sort of nature; I understood generally what they were doing--if I didn't agree with it, I expressed my disagreement; but I was not a key factor either in the design of of the '67 bill or in its eventual enactment.
- G: What didn't you agree with?
- H: I primarily did not agree with the idea of going back to the Congress with a terribly long involved redefinition of everything supposedly that OEO had learned, and detailed enunciation of program outlines-- I thought this was unnecessarily disruptive. I did believe that we should have at that point in time worked out an arrangement with HEW to delegate Head Start--



G: You believe at that time we should have?

H: We should have because everybody anticipated a very close and very hard battle. I felt that we could by that act in effect take a lot of the pressure off of the bill; I thought that Head Start was delegatable. And I in a very minor sort of way pushed for that move, but was overruled.

G: Is there a difference between what you, when you say it could be delegated and what people call spinning off the program?

H: Yes. I proposed delegation. That is, leaving it in the OEO bill--the authority to operate the program--but to announce either the intent or the fact of delegation to HEW. I felt that this was a good and reasonable compromise to the end that the program and its essential components would be protected by the capacity of OEO to oversee its operation in HEW. I felt that the alternative to that might very well be that it would be taken away as was Upward Bound taken by legislative fiat. And I felt that in terms of protecting the program, keeping it a program for the poor rather than letting it become a program for the middle class, that we could do better if we compromised a little bit at the beginning. As it turned out of course, it was not taken away by the Congress; the bill did pass, and so I guess in all fairness I would have to say that my judgment--my legislative judgment--at that time was bad. Except the issue is back with us currently.

G: Did this bill emanate from the White House; did it have Shriver concurrence?

H: Oh, no. This bill was almost exclusively fabricated right within

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this building; it was cleared on an almost continuing basis with the staff at the White House--Joe Califano in particular--but we were the architects. And Shriver was one of the chief architects, very personally involved in much of the language construction.

G: May I ask you for your opinion--could you perhaps talk for Sargent Shriver at this point--I'd like to ask you how did he see the role of OEO? Did he consistently oppose this spinning of programs or the delegation of programs? Did he envisage OEO to be a catalytic organization, as an innovative agency in government?

H: Sarge was very ambivalent about the whole question of delegation and spin-off. One of the first jobs that I had when I got here, and I've forgotten exactly how I happened to inherit it, but we were involved in the Title I--the manpower activities--and there had just been a mandate from the White House that the Department of Labor was to operate to the fullest extent possible all federal manpower programs. So I became the chief architect of building a delegation order with the Department of Labor. I used to have constant trouble with Sarge about how far we'd go on this thing. And when I say he was ambivalent, I mean that he would constantly reiterate the fact that this agency was set up to innovate, to develop, to mature, and then to hand programs over to the existing agencies of government. The only problem was that in Sarge's mind these programs never really reached that point, or at least I felt and still feel that--He'd kill me if he ever thought I had characterized him as a bureaucrat, but he really was; it tore his soul out to take one of these pieces and give it away to somebody else. And Head Start was a classic example because this was his prime creation;

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and whereas it had by this point in time, in my view, been quite well developed--it was one of the better developed programs that we had-- guidelines all issued, most of the decisions made, the mechanism set up, the funding level established, all these things had been met; it was ready to be administered by somebody else. But Sarge, no matter what he said, couldn't stand the thought of that program being taken away from OEO.

And let me say it was not just emotional, it was very political. He felt, and I think with a great deal of justification, that a program like Head Start constituted a shield for the agency against all of the other problems that we would get into with VISTA volunteers leading hunger strikes and Job Corps kids tearing up the dormitories and so forth--all the adverse things. So he saw Head Start as being the sweet plum--the sugar--that coated this particular bitter pill. And I'm sure there was a lot of justification in that. But as a consequence, to my knowledge, he never readily agreed to delegate a damned thing.

G: Was his concern that other agencies in government would not apply the same kinds of criteria that OEO had set up?

H: Yes, in large part it was that. He was very anti-establishment as far as the government was concerned.

G: Then this more or less confirms his choice then as OEO Director at the very beginning, doesn't it?

H: You mean the fact that he was chosen?

G: A unique maverick?

H: Oh, yes. Nobody else could have done it that I know of in the way, with flair, with the style that he did it. And he was anti-establishment

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and as a consequence, a good deal of the problem was with the other established agencies. They hated our guts, many of them.

G: Correct me if I'm wrong, but did you not go to the Hill in 1968 and oppose the spin-off of Head Start?

H: In 1968?

G: This past session.

H: Oh, yes. The so-called Dominick amendment.

G: It was quite different from the delegation--

H: Yes, that's right. I didn't go to the Hill; I got into a very nasty fight with Senator Morse about this, but I distinguished very strongly between my idea of delegating Head Start to an office in HEW, and spinning it off to the Office of Education, which is what Dominick called for.

G: You would have chosen which--?

H: Probably the Children's Bureau, or a special office reporting directly to the Secretary. But Dominick had some very real flaws in that it in effect turned the program over to the states--state educational agencies--and it was on this basis that I did oppose it and stated my opposition; and as a consequence got myself into very bad graces with Senator Morse.

G: What were Mr. Morse's objections to you?

H: You mean to my nomination?

G: Yes.

H: Well, very candidly I think Mr. Morse's objections start off with the 1967 closing of a number of Job Corps centers, including one in Oregon--Fort Vannoy. At that point the Senator declared to one of our staff people that as far as he was concerned, his only

objective in life was to take this agency apart and he'd just do it as quickly as he could. I think this then probably was the basis for his support of Dominick in the Dominick amendment to take Head Start out. And when I opposed that, the Senator took off on me and accused me of trying to thwart the will of the Congress, which of course was not the will of the Congress--it was the will at that point of the Senate, the House being in a completely different posture.

What got the Senator's ire up was a very innocent letter that I issued to all employees of the agency on the afternoon of the passage of the Dominick amendment in which I told them that the Senate had enacted this thing; I wanted them to hear from me and not read it in the morning paper and become disturbed. I told them that we had opposed it, and that we continued to oppose it. The Senator inferred from that some sort of nefarious scheme on my part to thwart his and the United States Senate's will. And he rose on a number of occasions on the Senate floor to express his view. This happened, unfortunately, to coincide with the President's nomination of me as the Director, and he would rise to say what a horrible bureaucrat I was and how I had acted completely immorally and perhaps illegally, and that obviously was unqualified to be the Director of the agency.

G: Does this stem with your identification or association with the OEO? OEO has never been popular since 1964. Or does it stem from that particular letter, do you think that his ire was aroused?

H: Of course, I know nothing about the Senator's attitude

toward the agency prior to 1966, but my understanding was that he was supportive of the agency prior to this unfortunate situation involving the Job Corps camp. And the Senator has a well-known reputation for getting a negative attitude and being rather bull-like in pursuing it. As far as I know, this was the start of his disenchantment, disaffection with OEO. May I add an interesting footnote? Early summer of this year, my wife and I received--this was right when the Morse problem was sort of at its height--an invitation to a very lovely state dinner at the White House. There were probably 200-250 guests, each seated at tables of six or eight people. My seating arrangement was exactly next to Senator Morse, which I presume represented some sort of ill-conceived staff work on the part of the White House social secretary.

G: Is HEW receptive to delegations of programs such as Head Start?

H: Oh, yes.

G: They want them?

H: Very much.

G: How about labor?

H: Well, most of our manpower activities representing some \$700,000,000 is in fact delegated to Labor; they are receptive--

G: I was thinking specifically--

H: You mean specifically Job Corps? I don't know. I don't know whether they want that or not. Up to this point Bill Wirtz on the record has always said that he didn't want Job Corps. This was the party line of course, and this would be what would be expected for him to say. And so at this point in time with Mr. Nixon's publicly stated views on Job Corps, I'm not sure whether given a free option, the

Department of Labor would want to take it on or not.

G: There was a study in the process of being made which was due to be given to the President in March of 1969 which would recommend what should happen to the Job Corps.

H: Not quite that way. I think it's in the Vocational Education Act, but I'm not sure. In one of the bills passed toward the end of the session, the Commissioner of the Office of Education was charged with the responsibility of giving a recommendation to the Congress on whether or not the Job Corps could feasibly be transferred from OEO to the Vocational Education Office in the Office of Education. That is due to the Congress by the 1st of March. There's another study due from the President on the future of Head Start; both of those are due on March 1.

G: If Job Corps were to go to the Office of Education, would this in any way alter the way the program is being run, or have any bearing on the objectives of the program and so on?

H: Well, I've never had a very clear picture in my mind exactly how it would be. Under the concept of it's going to the Office of Education it would be administered by state vocational education agencies. As you know, the Job Corps Program now--we've got about 110 centers scattered throughout the country. But for example, there are no centers at all in half a dozen southeastern states--

G: Was that the result of the governor's veto?

H: It was just determined that there would be one in the South; whether this was--

G: I noticed that big gap.

H: Whether this was a political decision or whether this was a governor veto or what it was, it was certainly a rational decision that if you were going to be faced with a completely negative attitude, you didn't want Job Corps in there. So there are none down there. If state agencies ran the program, I don't see how kids in these southeastern states, and of course primarily Negro, would be factored into the Job Corps equation at all. And conversely, whether a state like Minnesota could be expected to operate a Job Corps facility with kids from Alabama being taken care of in it. It's not a very clear picture as to what was contemplated. How these studies will come out or how the recommendation of the Office of Education will come out, I just don't know. But I don't think that the original thought of putting it in the Office of Vocational Education--I don't think it was very valid.

G: This is getting into speculative areas, but before we get into that, have you ever discussed with the President the President-Elect's program, his views and attitudes on some of the statements that he has made about OEO and the Poverty Program?

H: No. I've had no contact with the President on that subject at all.

G: What is your own view?

H: Of the President-Elect's attitude towards the program? My view is that the President-Elect has great need to accomplish what I'm sure is his prime objective, and that is, as he puts it, bring America back together again and bridging these gulfs. It seems to me his own greatest deficiency in terms of relationship with the various constituencies within the country, is with the particular clientele



that this program represents. It therefore seems to me that whereas he will have to, undoubtedly for cosmetic reasons, if nothing else, and rightfully so, make changes in organization, in personnel, in programs. But in terms of disavowing a program, the program or programs directed towards poverty population, I am completely confident that Mr. Nixon will not do that. The only thing that he has specifically stated that I know of about the program is his statement about the Job Corps. I don't think he was well briefed on that subject; as a matter of fact in one of his television interviews, he quoted a percorpsman cost of \$12,000 a year which is approximately twice what it is in fact--under the law it cannot exceed \$6,900. So I think that given an opportunity, Mr. Nixon will look again at the Job Corps; I think he will see its need; I think he will see that it comports with his apparently very strongly held views that private industry should be very heavily involved in social programs. Our big centers are all operated primarily by private industry. The biggest companies in America operate these centers. I think there are going to be a lot of pressures brought on him by various groups--religious, civic, and other--not to carry out an abolition of the program.

So I think there's going to be an accommodation between the program, the agency, and the new Administration. Now, I think Mr. Nixon needs very much to have the sort of relationship that this agency, with all of its faults, has with community groups and community groups have with the poor people. It's not perfect, God knows it's not perfect; but it is a bridge of communication and understanding between the federal establishment and the 26,000,000

poor people in America, and I think he has got to maintain that.

G: What prompted that question was Mr. Agnew's statement about "like the surgeon who doesn't consult with the patient in making a decision." I gather Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew would have to resolve that kind of difference; it seems to me to be in direct opposition to the whole concept of maximum feasible participation involved in the corps.

H: Oh, yes. And yet to be perfectly fair with Mr. Agnew, there's much to be said for not overstating the proposition of maximum feasible participation. A lot of poor people have the idea that there was some sort of a commitment here in this program; that poor people--and when I say poor people, I mean people who have very little education, very little cultural background, practically no understanding of government or society in general, not well-read--could come in and run the Poverty Program from the top down. And I've even had it said to me by one militant in that group, "Boy, you move over. I'll move in there and run that job." Well, of course, nothing would delight me more than to have somebody else run this job. The only trouble is that I just don't think that most of those people are capable of doing it.

So to the extent that Mr. Agnew was saying that the poor must work with, must to some degree be dependent upon the better educated,

the more affluent segments of the society, Mr. Agnew is absolutely correct. The poor people cannot run this program per se. But you turn around and look at it from the other angle and say that, "Now we are all-knowing and well-educated and well-grounded in the ways of the bureaucracy and the society and so forth, and therefore we can design and put into place and service these people and get them out of poverty;" that's wrong too, because unless those people feel that they are being listened to, they are being consulted, that they've got a feeling of participation, there's going to be a rejection process set in. So you cannot go all one way or all the other. I think Mr. Agnew somewhat overstated it in the direction of the importance of the establishment. But on the other hand, I don't want to completely throw out what he said because there is much value to be said in refuting the idea, as he put it, that you tell a surgeon how deep you want to make the incision.

G: Are you satisfied with the 33 1/3 percent split down the line on the community action board's involvement of the poor people?

H: Yes, I think that's a quite reasonable breakdown of the total.

G: The whole concept of maximum feasible participation to your knowledge-- was that the intent of maximum feasible participation on a one-third basis; or was it--?

H: I don't think anybody really thought in the beginning about any sort of percentage breakdown on the boards. I think what they were talking about was exactly the way the words came out--"maximum feasible participation." Maximum feasible participation does not mean that you have no one in the program that has gotten above an eighth grade level in education; that everything is run by people who come directly

out of the ghetto. That goes beyond feasible. So you go as far as you can to get as much involvement as you possibly can get into it, and at the same time maintaining certain standards of management, of financial accountability, of understanding and technical expertise. And that's about as far as I go. One-third on the board seems to me to be a fair way to draw a line.

G: I seem to be jumping around on this, excuse me for it, but in 1967 where Community Action--first the Administration bill put certain limitations, then Congress acted, and then the Green Amendment had a different kind of community action program than you did in 1966. Did this have anything at all to do with the omnipresence of what we called in history, Alinskyism? [Saul Alinsky]

H: Again, I'm not sure I understand your question. The Green Amendment was a conscious effort on the part of this agency and friends of this agency to satisfy some very, very negative attitudes particularly among southern members of the House, to the end that it was felt that unless some sort of compromise was put into the bill it would never pass, and this agency would have come to a screeching halt on June 30, 1967, when our authorization expired. So this was done knowingly, albeit somewhat surreptitiously, to work out a basis and accommodation with those people that would allow them to vote for the continuation of the agency and the programs. And I don't think the Alinsky concept was really involved in this. It was a political compromise that was worked out.

G: What is the relationship between the demonstration projects and

Community Action projects?

H: Well, the main comment I can make on the Blackstone Rangers, or what's called the TWO Project, is that it was a classic blunder on our part. We thought--Shriver thought that he had Mayor Daley's concurrence in putting the project on. There had been much discussion prior to its funding about its being operated by the Chicago Community Action organization, CCUO. It was decided not to do it that way, but apparently they never quite recovered from that decision. They wanted it when it was funded directly; they objected very strenuously to it; the police never liked it; the mayor never liked it. Although, as I say, Shriver thought he had the concurrence. So they were at a standstill for a year. And the project did not bring any really substantive results. There was undoubtedly some fraud in connection with it. I don't think it was ever as bad as the Chicago Tribune and the police painted it, but it was certainly never as good as a viable project should have been. It was a mistake; it was an error; it was an unfortunate circumstance, and I got out of it as fast as I could.

G: When you say all this, do you mean that in terms of method, the way it was set up that it was a mistake, or are you suggesting that this kind of element in this society can't be dealt with by OEO, or could it be dealt with?

H: No, I think we have to deal with this element in society. And I think this was an honest conceptual means of dealing with the element of society. But the political aspect with the mayor, the project design in terms of the amount of autonomy that it gave to these gang leaders in terms of conducting a manpower training program was

erroneous. You get back to this business of maximum feasible participation. Here we leaned over too far in terms of putting uneducated, perhaps even dishonest, people in charge of a great deal of federal money and a very important program without the proper supervision by the establishment. And I don't mean necessarily bureaucrats, but professionals. And we didn't have it in there; we tried midstream to get more of it in. By that time it was too far along to get it. So, no, I think it's a real part of the poverty program. If you're going to deal with the problem, you're going to have to deal with disaffected youth, and particularly ghetto youth. Somebody has got to do it. We stuck our necks out, we made a bad choice in the way we did it; but I think certainly our intentions were completely honorable, our objective was completely desirable. And some way or another we have to find a modus operandi to deal with this problem in the future.

G: Are there any other institutions in society capable of dealing with this problem?

H: Well, I would hope really that the foundations would take a larger role in this.

G: They're not taking a very large role now?

H: Well, they're trying. Of course, they're spread awfully thin as well. But ideally because of the political impact of a thing like this, particularly when it goes sour, it would be so much better if a good strong foundation had put their \$750,000 into that project instead of OEO.

G: Mr. Harding, if we can turn to another area. Many critics of the war on poverty have said that Viet Nam has prevented the President from

following through on his commitments to an unconditional war on poverty. One critic has pointed out that one month's expenditure in Viet Nam equals more than the annual appropriations for OEO. Would you consider this to be a fair criticism, or would you have to make any comments to make on it?

H: I don't know that I would characterize it as a criticism. I think it is undoubtedly true that if there had not been a Viet Nam, or that conversely, if Viet Nam were to come to a screeching halt right away, that there would be--I guess the present estimate is somewhere between twelve and fifteen billion additional available for domestic purposes. I think OEO could have shared in such a peace dividend. But I don't think of it in terms of a criticism--we have commitments to do, all sorts of things, including our national defense. So the fact that unfortunately this agency came into existence almost at the same time that we started making our heavy involvement in Viet Nam is just an unfortunate historical fact, and not one that I would characterize critically.

G: What could OEO use? How much money would OEO in ideal conditions want to operate a war on poverty?

H: Well, in the first place it would be a figure that would mount. In my view we could not reasonably use, for example this forthcoming year, much in excess of three billion; our current budget is at about two billion level. I don't think we could undertake more than a 50 percent expansion in any one year. But I think we could progress--our programs could progress in scope, magnitude, intensity, to the point where we could undoubtedly operate reasonably after a period of several years at the eight or ten billion level.

G: Could you describe the process that OEO undergoes in the working out of the budgetary requests both in dealing with the Bureau of the Budget, the President, and Congress?

H: Well, we do have a five-year plan projection which is sort of blue sky in terms of what we call the universal need--pricing that out. And you come up to a budget year, and you start talking to the Bureau in those terms, whatever particular year it is. The Bureau then comes back with a so-called mark which is always appreciably below what you've said is your need, and then there's a series of reclaims back and forth in which we go up and they come a little bit towards meeting us. This is a process that goes on for a period of several months until there's finally a firm figure agreed to which then become the figure in the President's budget. This goes over, of course, in January, and from that point on our battles are with the Appropriations Committees on the Hill. The record indicates a pretty good appropriation versus the Presidential request. We went in this current year, for example, for about 2.1 billion, and we came out with about a 1.9 billion. So in terms of percentage, we fared as well as most agencies fare.

G: Has the President pushed hard for OEO? In other words, when OEO goes to the Hill, what kind of support do you get from the White House?

H: I feel the President has, in spite of his irritation at times and I know he has had irritation with the program, I think he has been very supportive. For example, when he called me over when Sarge left, really the only question he asked me was whether or not I was prepared to go up and fight for that full budgetary request. And no matter



what anybody said to me about what his views were, he wanted every dollar that he had requested for this program, and he wanted me to go over there and fight for every dollar, which is exactly what I did. I remember at one point during the appropriation hearings before Congressman Flood, who was chairman of our subcommittee, I commented that--the question of that sort came up. Well, what does the President really want, and I related to the Congressman that the President had told me that he wanted every dollar that he had requested. Mr. Flood, who is quite a theatrical gentleman, sort of screwed up his face--"Well, that's not in accordance with what I understand to be the President's views." I said, "Well, if you have any information to the contrary, Mr. Flood, I'd be happy to know about it. That's my instruction from the President, to tell you and to tell the Senate that he wants appropriated every dollar that he has requested." And to the best of my knowledge he stood with us throughout that whole process. I know that--I'm not sure that he personally, but I know that members of his staff interceded with Congressman Mahon in the final juggling that went on between the House and the Senate in order to get the best deal that could be gotten between those two figures.

G: Who on the White House staff would that have been?

H: Well, that would have been primarily Mike Manatos.

G: What kinds of influence--

H: Pardon me, Mike Manatos on the Senate side, and Barefoot Sanders on the House side.

G: What kind of influence or what kind of pressures can the President and the White House exert during a Congressional session? In what

ways does the President bring that power to bear?

H: Of course, I've never been privy to one of these discussions. I assume that there are certain trade-offs that are discussed. But I do know that he has always been very close to Chairman Mahon, and he's able to talk to him, ask him to be considerate of a particular request. Similarly, members of his staff such as Sanders and Manatos are constantly dealing with these people and what their deals are, I honestly do not know, but I assume that there are quid pro quos involved.

G: Is there a good liaison and a good relationship set up between OEO and the White House?

H: My relations with the White House during the time I've been here seem to be very good, yes. We worked primarily with Califano's office on all program matters, but we also have direct contacts with Manatos, Barefoot, and others over there.

G: Let me digress a moment. You mentioned Califano. I think it was in 1967 that a Califano memorandum was somewhat of an issue during the Congressional session; I think it had something to do with Senator Clark's job creation bill. Apparently the story was that Shriver and Califano had drawn up this memo and sent it out and indicated White House opposition to this. Is this the case, do you know?

H: I have a recollection of a problem about a memorandum that was distributed to members of the Senate Committee, not distributed to Senator Clark, that caused Senator Clark a great deal of concern and members of the committee a great deal of concern. I do not recall whether that memorandum was prepared by Califano, I don't

believe it was--it was prepared some place else, and I don't even remember the subject, but there was a controversy. I know it particularly involved our Congressional relations staff here in OEO, because they were supposed to be the ones that made the distribution, and there was much controversy as to whether or not it was their failure that Senator Clark was not involved, or somebody else's.

G: Does OEO support a job creation program or public employment program?

H: This is one of the items that we have in our long range plan, yes, and one which I personally support.

G: And does the President support it?

H: I don't know. I never discussed that with the President.

G: Could you tell me what kind of response the five-year plan elicits--who does it go to?

H: It goes to the Bureau of the Budget.

G: Does it ever get to the President?

H: I seriously doubt if it ever gets to the President. I assume that the Director of the Bureau of the Budget gives the President some sort of an overview of perhaps a summarization of these plans from a number of agencies. I would imagine that there's not time to get into details on any particular agency plan. And let me also make the point that in terms of our plan, our plan relates to the total Administration war on poverty; that is, money is being spent by HEW, labor, HUD, etc., for poor people, and not just monies appropriated to this agency.

G: I was curious to know whether this had had an effect. It was in 1967 I think the amendment specified that this kind of a plan had to be--it simply put into law what OEO had been doing.

- H: Well, the '67 amendments require that we submit a copy of this plan to the Congress. We haven't done that yet.
- G: Also in 1967 the amendments created the National Advisory Council?
- H: Yes.
- G: Did that replace the Council on Economic Opportunity?
- H: There are two. There's the National Advisory Council or committee, and there's the Economic Opportunity Council. The National Advisory Council are external people that meet and go over OEO programs and presumably advise the President and then the Director on their views on what we're doing or not doing. The Economic Opportunity Council is an in-house including the various Secretaries in the domestic area with a chairman, and I've forgotten exactly whether the Vice President is designated as chairman or somebody else. But it's in-house. These existed prior to the '67 amendments, but they were ratified in the '67 amendments. And there was an addition of a staff provided for the Economic Opportunity Council in the '67 amendments. That particular piece of legislation has never been acted upon either. It is a Presidential appointee, and the President has never seen fit to appoint anyone.
- G: Do you know why that is?
- H: No, I don't.
- G: How successful has the Economic Opportunity Council been in terms of coordinating the total--?
- H: Practically useless. In the first place, since reconstituted by the '67 amendments, it has never met. And prior to that time its meetings were sort of discussion sessions. There were, as nearly as I can tell, little or no results arising out of that. And the provision of permanent staff or secretariat for

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that council was supposed to give it some strength, some influence. But as I say that has never been activated, so there has really been no--

G: What does this mean in terms of coordination, in terms of effective exchange between members or heads of various departments who are involved in--?

H: Well, there's an awful lot of exchange both between heads and between staffs. What it does mean is that any real coordination of terms of a positive force pulling together and the working out of problems either occurs unilaterally between the agencies involved, or is effectuated by the White House staff, primarily by Califano and his minions. So in my view there is a great gap; that there should be a mechanism not just for poverty coordination, but for domestic coordination. And I have long felt that this was a missing element in our total federal picture.

G: Have you brought this view to the President's attention?

H: I have never had the opportunity to discuss this with the President. I've discussed it many times with the Bureau, in various seminar groups, and so forth, over the years, but I've never discussed it with the President.

G: How active is the President in the war on poverty now? Was it ever active in '64--that was the keystone in his Administration, and he seemed to throw a great deal of executive support behind it.

H: It's kind of hard for me to make a judgment on how active he was directly in those first early years. He has not been active personally during the period that I've been with the agency; that is, since '66. I have, for example since I have been Acting Director, which was

starting in March of this year--I have had one telephone call from the President. The meetings that I have had with him were not--I mean I've never been called in to discuss the problems that he may have in his mind, so that anything that I get or the agency gets directly from him must necessary come indirectly through members of his staff.

G: At the beginning, was the Director given the opportunity to attend Cabinet meetings?

H: My understanding was that that was originally contemplated, but he never did.

G: And you yourself have never--?

H: I have attended one Cabinet meeting, and this was for the purpose of giving a presentation that was on the agenda.

G: You do brief the President, don't you?

H: No.

G: My impression was that some time this past summer that you had briefed the President on the progress of the war on poverty, and that he had made a statement. I can't recall offhand to whom he was making the statement and so on, but it had to do with the latest figures.

H: I think you're talking about the one Cabinet meeting that I did attend where I briefed the President and the Cabinet on some new figures that we'd just gotten out of the Bureau of Census on decreases in the poverty population. And that was the one instance that I briefed the President.

G: What was his response?

H: His response was he was interested in the figures, I think. Unfortunately,

as it worked out there were two or three other briefings that preceded mine. And by the time he got around to me at the end of the line, he gave me three minutes to give a fifteen-minute presentation, and I was not exactly able to do justice to the information.

G: Are you satisfied with the arrangements--the relationship between OEO and the White House? Would you prefer to see better contact between yourself as Acting Director and the President?

H: Yes, I would prefer that. But you see that's really so much a matter of personal chemistry. I find it with my own staff. There are people that I feel I can deal with more readily, accomplish more, and I deal with those people. And there are members of the staff that I see relatively little of, not that they're not important. In these cases I deal in large part through some special assistant that I have in my office. It's not that I reject these people; it's just that one gets into sort of a habit pattern. And I think the President got into a sort of habit pattern in terms of dealing with this agency. He has dealt with us ever since I've been with the agency almost exclusively through special assistants. Of course when you say what you prefer, yes, it's always nicer to deal with the boss yourself than through some spokesman for the boss.

G: To turn to that critical year in 1967, do you know what the White House or President Johnson's response was to both the charges and the exoneration of OEO to those charges of anti-poverty personnel being involved in the riots? Were you ever consulted during that period of time?

H: No. Frankly, I don't know whether the President was ever briefed on those riot statistics or not, whether Sarge ever got over there

and briefed him or not. And obviously, I don't know what his reaction would have been.

G: The reason I asked that is because it was in the report that finally emerged from the commission that investigated that OEO programs were studied at some length, I think, and OEO received high honors both its participation in helping to stop riots--

H: You're talking about the Kerner Commission?

G: Yes, the Kerner Commission report. Would you concur with everything that was said in the Kerner Commissioner report regarding OEO?

H: Yes. Regarding OEO, I think they had a very good fix on the problem. I think our program did more to help than to hurt certainly; there were very very few people directly associated with the program that were involved in any of the rioting. But there were many many instances where our program people, our Community Action people, were working with the police and law enforcement groups to solve situations in the ghettos. Now, in the longer range in terms of what does Community Action do to either repress or to bring forth violence within a community, that's probably something that the historians are going to have to answer. I don't know. But in terms of the direct action of people, I think it's true that our people, people employed by the Community Action program, did not activate violence but in fact tried to calm it. And that's essentially what the Kerner Commission report said.

G: Mr. Harding, do you think that the concept consensus which has been identified with the Johnson Administration is compatible or incompatible with the potentially disruptive aspect of Community Action although that may not be its intent?



H: I think probably not. I think this may be very well one of the aspects of Community Action, the abrasive confrontation that has grown in many cases out of Community Action, that was not contemplated by the President; and that if it had been contemplated by him, he would have in some way precluded that aspect being built into the system. It was built into the system. The legal services is an example, I think, of this sort of direct battling against the walls of the establishment. And I think this in large part may account for some of the disaffection that I'm sure the President has felt towards the program in latter years.

G: You once made the statement that--I think it was just a recent statement you made at a seminar, I think, in New York--that the war on poverty was conservative in outlook. What did you mean by that?

H: I don't believe I made it in New York. I have made it; in viewing the elephant from one position, I think it's reasonable to say. I could make some other statements that might seem contradictory, but I think that this is defensible. It's conservative in that it does essentially attempt to redress injustice by socially acceptable systems, be it the law, be it the educational process. It's conservative in that it has from the very beginning attempted to make maximum use of the private business sector--I referred earlier to the Job Corps activity for example. The money that is now being spent in rather large quantities with the National Alliance of Businessmen for getting ghetto job opportunities for the disadvantaged. So in all of those senses I think it is a classically conservative or a Republican type operation. It does have its offbeats that tend to refute this, the TWO problem for example. I'm sure no one would

consider that to be conservative. But on balance it is characterized by real conservatism.

G: Do you think that OEO has been successful in helping to educate the American people with the meaning of poverty--what it means to be impoverished, do you think that OEO has been successful in educating the people in terms of the environmental aspect of poverty as opposed to individual causes?

H: Yes, I certainly don't think that OEO can claim exclusive responsibility for getting that message across because, simultaneously with the advent of this program, a great many other sectors of the society--particularly the churches--became very involved in this, and the labor unions and so forth. So we've certainly participated in what I would consider to be a tremendous educational endeavor; first and perhaps most importantly the very fact of poverty in America, and then the nature of that--the abject conditions in which millions of Americans live in ghettos and in Appalachia. So, yes, I think it has certainly done a tremendous job in getting that message across.

G: Would you say that OEO or the war on poverty is a part of the national consensus?

H: That OEO is part?

G: Yes.

H: I don't understand that question.

G: In the sense that it's here to stay.

H: Oh, yes, I think the war on poverty is here to stay.

G: What form it might take might differ a little.

H: Might differ, yes. But the fact that it has been recognized as a national problem, that it's not solved, that it's still with us, that there has been a commitment to do something about it on the part

of the Congress, yes.

G: I think it was A. Philip Randolph who said that President Johnson would go down in history as the President of the war on poverty. Would you agree with that?

H: I think you'd almost have to by definition agree with that.

G: Is there anything that you would like to add to this? Do you, for example, have any personal insights that you might give me on President Johnson, his personality, his characteristics, his commitments, and so on, from your own knowledge of the President?

H: Well, as I've indicated throughout our discussion, my contacts with the President on a personal basis have been really very infrequent. I come out of the career service, and I guess I have a reputation in the bureaucracy. I think that is the only reason that I ever got involved in this particular aspect of this Administration, and therefore although I happen to come from his state, I've never had a personal relationship with him at all. I do not have one now. We've never shared a bottle of bourbon or had a fatherly-son chat, so I don't have any of those sort of relationships with him. I admire him tremendously; he was undoubtedly one of the most forceful men in America. I think it has been unfortunate the way things have developed as far as he's concerned nationally and internationally. I guess if you could put things together in a more perfect world, you could have that drive and that energy and dedication combined with a little bit more of humanness in terms of dealing with people; that is, I get a playback not from my dealings with him because, as I say, they've all been pretty stereotype, but in terms of his dealings with his staff, I've seen guys literally jump in

the White House when the bell rings, running and almost apoplectic. This sort of fear--personal fear--that has been engendered at least in most of his associates, I deplore. I'm terribly sorry it exists. As I say, it may not be possible to have that drive, that vibrance, and still have people reacting to you as a human being. They don't react to the President that way.

I recounted earlier on when I had that private session with the President, Bill Moyers came in. And he sat there looking at the President, as close as he was to the President, it was as though he was hearing him for the first time--he was on edge, he was completely like a statue sitting there and listening to the President's words; and on his feet and responding in just an almost, to me, an unbelievable way. There was no relaxation at all. He was not the sort of guy that you would have thought, knowing the years that he had been with the President. So there is this unfortunate thing in which I think Johnson could have been more effective if he had had that ability to keep these people--

G: Do you think he understands people?

H: I just don't know. I think probably he puts his programs and his objectives above people, and maybe this is what a President has to do ultimately.

G: He has been called a political animal, that he can't think anything but political thoughts, that he lives politics daily; that even in his recreation he doesn't commit himself totally to it. I think this would help explain--

H: He's just completely dedicated to what he's doing, and this seems to

shut out--I'm sure not with his family, but with his associates. And I assume that Bill Moyers was as close to him as anybody has been. But even there you didn't get--at least in the couple of observations that I had--you didn't get the feeling that these were two human beings that were relating to each other.

G: Do you think this explains the great turnover in the White House staff?

H: Well, I think he wore people out; yes, I don't think there's any doubt about it. You just hardly ever talked to those guys much before ten or eleven o'clock at night that they're not in their office. They're there all the time.

I remember way back even before I came to Washington we had a secretary in the office in which I worked in San Antonio, a very bright young girl who had the opportunity to come up and work in Senator Johnson's office; and she lasted about five or six months. And I happened to run into her later on, and she said it was just a miserable, miserable place to work; that the professional staff was on edge constantly and were taking out their edginess and their frustrations on the clerical staff of which she was a part. She just couldn't stand it; she just lasted a very short period. He has driven all of his life, I guess; that's the nature of the man.

G: Mr. Harding, perhaps one last question. How would you interpret the circumstances of your not having been confirmed as Director of OEO?

H: The President sent over the nomination in the middle of July. There were reasons with which I'm not completely familiar that the committee did not want to hold any hearings; that is, the Senate Labor Committee.

So nothing happened for several weeks. I heard nothing from the committee, and I figured sooner or later that they'd get around to it. Then two circumstances arose; one, I became involved in the controversy with Senator Morse, and Senator Morse of course was the second ranking on the majority side. And it's my information that he put a block on any action on my nomination.

At about the same time the TWO hearings got on the front page, and Senator Byrd of Virginia--and since I come from Virginia there was the matter of Senatorial prerogative on that--Senator Byrd asked me to give him a letter on my views on TWO. There was an unfortunate misunderstanding, I was away on leave, the Senator didn't know it and by the time I got back, he was mad that I had not responded to his letter. I finally got that cleared up.

At about the same time that I got that cleared up, Senator Morse decided that he was no longer going to object. And by this time the Fortas question was a matter of national concern in the Senate, and Senator Dominick, mad--apparently about the Fortas thing and about my opposition on the Head Start amendment--refused to go along with what was then attempted. This was at the very end of the session. The chairman tried to poll the committee without having a hearing. And under this procedure if one Senator objects to the poll and demands a hearing, then the committee has to meet. So within the last three or four days of the sessions, Senator Hill did call a meeting of the committee to try to get through my nomination, Mr. Perrin's nomination, and Pat Kennedy for VISTA. By this time so many Senators--including Senator Morse who was of course out fighting for his life--were absent, [that] the committee

was unable to get a quorum. Therefore they were unable to meet in executive session and take an action on the nomination, so it died with the closing of Congress. I don't read anything particularly nefarious in the whole thing; it was one of those unfortunate sets of circumstances, or maybe fortunate, I don't know. I'm pretty fatalistic about these things.

G: As a matter of routine, does your nomination come up again this next--?

H: No.

G: What happens?

H: Not to my knowledge. I assume what will happen is that President Nixon will send a nomination for a new Director.

G: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Harding. It has been very valuable, I assure you.

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By Bertrand M. Harding

to the

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